32R2

7/19

Spiritual Practice

ITS CONDITIONS AND PRELIMINARIES

Ananda

LIBRARY
No.
BA
...shram

ADVAITA ASHRAMA

A traveller in the spiritual path narrates in these pages the joys and sorrows as well as the difficulties a spiritual seeker has to face in his journey towards the Supreme.

Price : Rs. 2·50

7419

LIBRARY
No. ....
Sh [illegible] yee Ashram
BENARES

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

ITS CONDITIONS AND PRELIMINARIES

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

ITS CONDITIONS AND PRELIMINARIES

ANANDA

LIBRARY
No............ 7/19
Shri Shri ... ayee Ashram
BANARAS

ADVAITA ASHRAMA
5 DEHI ENTALLY ROAD
CALCUTTA 14

Published by
SWAMI BUDHANANDA
PRESIDENT, ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, PITHORAGARH, HIMALAYAS

All rights reserved
Sixth Impression, June 1973
4M3C

Set and Printed in India
IN 10 ON 12 PT. TIMES TYPE
BY P. C. RAY
AT SRI GOURANGA PRESS PRIVATE LTD.
5 CHINTAMANI DAS LANE
CALCUTTA 9

TO

SWAMI SHIVANANDA

WITH THE AUTHOR'S

MOST HUMBLE OBEISANCE

LIBRARY
No. 7/19
Shri Shri Anandamayee Ashram
BANARAS

LIBRARY
No.......... 7/19
Shri mayee Ashram
BANARAS

INTRODUCTION

When first the beauty of spiritual life dawns on our vision, our reaction to it is pre-eminently emotional. We then lack understanding, we do not know the bearings of the path that leads to the spiritual goal—we are moved by an impulse. But very soon we feel the want of clear knowledge. Doubts assail us and we yearn to know the why and the wherefore of things. He who writes these words was one who felt the same need. He remembers the days of his difficulties, and believes that if he undertakes a discussion of the preliminary stages and conditions of practical religion, he will be doing a service, however meagre and imperfect it may be.

The writer wishes it to be clearly understood that in all he has said in the following pages, he lays no claim to infallibility. He has written as he has understood. And he has communicated his knowledge even as a traveller speaks of his experiences of the way—however ill-perceived and ill-conceived—to others travelling along the same path. He claims nothing more.

A.

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION 5

I IN THE OUTER COURT . . . 11

II SANDHYA-VANDANA AND KIRTANA . 21

III PRANAYAMA 28

IV INTELLECTUALISM *versus* SPIRITUALITY 35

V ON THE THRESHOLD 44

VI WHEN SHALL WE RENOUNCE? . . 51

VII IS RENUNCIATION NECESSARY? . . 60

VIII EXTERNAL RENUNCIATION . . 67

IX IS HUMAN LOVE A HELP? . . . 75

X THE CASE OF THE UNMARRIED . . 82

XI THE CASE OF THE MARRIED . . 91

XII KARMA-YOGA 98

XIII BRAHMACHARYA 105

XIV THE QUESTION OF FOOD . . . 113

XV THE NECESSITY OF THE GURU . . 121

XVI SIGNS OF A TRUE GURU . . . 127

CONCLUSION 135

I

IN THE OUTER COURT

There are some people who think that they have received the call of religion ; they give up worldly occupations and take to the ways of the avowedly religious. Some even go to monasteries in their temporary zeal, seeking admission to the life of renunciation. But it often happens that many of these candidates for the life of religion and renunciation are hardly fit for it. They lack the preparation and qualifications without which religious life proves dry and barren, extremely miserable and even harmful.

For the practice of religion is not easy. It is not merely a matter of choice. Many are the stages that must be covered before the man of the world reaches the point of real, serious religion. Most men scarcely know of the existence of these stages, or if they are aware of them, they do not duly consider them. Ill-qualified and ill-equipped, they are eager to reap the blessings religion offers. The result is mental confusion and profound disappointment.

The vast majority of mankind are not really fit to take up the religious life seriously. They are still far, far off from the requisite condition of mind. They have too much body-consciousness and are obsessed and bound by finite things. Even a far distant glimpse of the Infinite cannot yet be for them. They want the pleasures of the body, power, earthly riches, sexual enjoyment and long life; and they are afraid of renunciation and death. Thus most men live and die, completely earth-bound, without any conscious effort to break through its limitations. For them religion can only be formal. If they were left alone on a solitary island, and given the means for worldly occupations, they would not trouble about religion. But since they have to live in human society where religion exists as a universal institution and where they learn certain habits of thought and actions, apparently religious, they appear to be interested in religion. But they have no real idea of it.

This, however, is not a complete picture of even the worldly man. There is another and brighter side of the picture. This other side depicts the hope and the unfolding glory of man. Man does not live for himself alone. Even the most ordinary man of the world cannot remain satisfied with loving himself alone. He also loves others, even though they may only be his own relations. He has moral consciousness. He seeks more and more knowledge : he has caught the lure of truth. He has the sense of beauty. It is true this latter aspect is dormant in the life of most men, but it exists nevertheless.

It is this that leads man upwards to the realisation of truth and the fulfilment of life. Moral sense, aesthetic sense, love, hunger for knowledge and truth, activity—these are the saving and ennobling elements in a man's life. Out of them springs religion. In the complete elimination of the former aspect and the full and complete development of the latter, lies the culmination of religion.

In the primary stages when the animal is strong in man, religion for him can only be submission to sacred beliefs and observance of forms and ceremonies. Religion is not real and vital to him. Nevertheless the sincere observance of the forms and adherence to the beliefs are essentially necessary for him and play an important part in the evolution of his spiritual consciousness. To most persons religion appeals for its occasions of festivity and aesthetic enjoyment. Hence in all countries we have temples, images, mythologies, gorgeous ceremonials and festivals connected with religion. The fact is, man has to transcend the grossness of matter and train his mind to dwell on finer realities before he can ever hope to be religious. Art, morality, search for knowledge, intense activity and charity and love help immensely in training the mind to feel and perceive finely.

What is art? It is the presentation of matter and objects of the senses clothed in the light of the supernatural. We all know why we take food, wear clothes or live in a house. Yet we are always trying to forget the ostensible purpose of these actions. For their immediate objects are gross, however necessary they may be to life; and we want to forget the material aspects of our life. So we clothe them with art. We try to drown the material side of eating, dressing or dwelling in the consciousness of superfine beauty. Mere nourishing food is not enough for us. The food must be delectable, having fine form, colour, smell, and taste. It must be served in an artistic fashion, on choice plates and dishes. The eating place must be beautiful, and we must hold interesting converse as if conversation were the important part and eating only secondary. Our clothes must not only be sufficient to protect us against the ravages of weather, but they must be beautiful. To the mind, beauty is more important in a cloth than its wearing qualities. It is the same with our dwellings. In this way, we learn to transcend the gross and perceive the finer realities, and the mind learns to feel a profound dissatisfaction for the material life and to yearn for higher realities.

But art by itself is not enough for the elevation of the mind of the ordinary man. It may debilitate it also ; for beauty is elusive and we may often mistake the phantom for the reality. Hence there must also be moral struggle. Nothing but a strong moral consciousness and aspiration after high ideals, not merely a profession thereof, can give wings to our perceptions of beauty and make them soar into the serene heights of spirituality. Devoid of moral consciousness, art often wallows in the mire of earthliness. Morality gives us strength. It teaches us to stand on and live by impressional principles. Through morality also we overcome the gross and rise to the planes of the fine.

Morality gives a correct tone to all our motives and actions, our labours in and our relations to the world.

Love equally releases us from the limitations of the gross. Love and service kill the little self and rend asunder the bonds that hold us to the world of matter, to our body.

Similarly knowledge and activity. Knowledge reveals wonders within the apparently commonplace, and leads us on from the visible and apparent to the world lying beyond our present conception. And intense activity satisfies and eventually destroys our worldly instincts, and gives us the taste of a higher, finer life. The little things of the world, the little acquisitions, and exultations over little triumphs no longer satisfy us. We want spaciousness and bigger things.

All these forces are working slowly but steadily for the uplift and liberation of man. They are impelling him towards real religion. Without them the intermediate stages between the ordinary man and the religious man cannot be covered. The essential condition of spirituality is the annihilation of the lower self and the desire for earthly things. A mind scattered over a million objects of desire cannot reach out towards God. It must unite and propel its scattered rays in one single direction; then only will it reveal the face of God. But such renunciation of desire is at first impossible for it. It is too gross; it is almost hopelessly enmeshed in desire; it cannot perceive the finer realities. Art, morality, love, service, knowledge, and activity alone can help the mind out of its present worldliness.

But without adherence to a religion and submission to its fundamentals, none of these can be properly effective. In fact, unless we believe in some eternal, ultimate reality, and in the solidarity of life and the universe, art, morality, social service, or knowledge cannot properly flourish. We are not speaking here of those exceptional persons who instinctively achieve the highest without any conscious admission of religious truths. But most men cannot properly understand or benefit by art, morality, or charity, unless they relate them to the principle of Divinity. That is why in all ages we find art, morality, and service existing as aspects of religion, connected to its principles and institutions.

So for the benefit of the vast majority of mankind, in order that they may eventually be fit to live religion truly and seriously, it is necessary, absolutely necessary, that our corporate life should be made more and more aesthetic, more morally exalted, more full of charity, love, and service, of eagerness for knowledge and truth, and intense activity. In fact, if men were to be tremendously active, mindful at the same time of art, morality, and service, they would do much greater good to themselves than if they were to mumble prayers, visit temples, and play at religion as the majority do at present. Unfortunately, however, true moral or aesthetic development, or passion for service, is not possible for them without conscious relation to religious beliefs and institutions. Hence for practical purposes, formal religion, with its dogmas, myths, and rituals, must always be; but morality, art, service, industry, and knowledge must be developed to their fullest extent, for in these lies the real salvation of most men.

In Hindu phraseology, Tamas (inertia) must be overcome by Rajas (activity); Rajas should be conquered by Sattva (tranquil joy). But Sattva can only grow gradually. Sattva, serenity of mind, wherein alone Truth and Reality can be properly reflected, is not born suddenly. There are gradations, as represented by the mental effects of art, morality, knowledge, love, service, etc.

But why do we insist on art, morality, etc., if religion itself can spiritualise the gross and the material? The question is a pertinent one. When religion becomes institutional, it is affirmed by people as a matter of course. Thus Hindus believe in their religion and accept the truth of its teachings. There are also rules and customs pertaining to it, which, though they differ with different sections of people and in different places, are yet more or less observed as sacred. Even where seriousness about religion is lacking, there is often an acceptance of beliefs and an observation of rules. Thus before eating, most Hindus offer the food mentally to God. In all affairs of life, such association of the Divine idea with mundane things has become an established rule. Hinduism teaches its votaries to spiritualise life in all its activities and human relations. This direct relation of earthly things to God through spiritualisation, without the aid of art etc., no doubt serves to train the mind to feel and perceive finer realities.

So long as people believe in religion, no doubt religion itself will be very beneficial in teaching them fineness of perception. But as religion is not taken seriously by the majority of people, more tangible means, more appealing intermediaries, must be found for them and associated with religion. Morality is more real and tangible to most people than the spiritual verities; knowledge is more effective; service is more fruitful. We should, therefore, lay the utmost emphasis on them in the case of the average man. Spiritualisation of the concerns of life is all right. But most men can only slowly progress along that path without substantial aid from morality, art, knowledge, action and service.

If, then, any one proposes to us to enter the religious life, the first thing we should consider is whether he has got rid of Tamas, whether his mind has learnt to perceive and appreciate finer things, if he has a strong moral sense, and if the rays of his mind have been focussed within a narrow circle. These are some of the essential conditions. Without them, a man is ill-qualified to take to the religious life. To such a man the best advice would be : Go and be active ; be moral and serve your fellow-men selflessly and lovingly.

Unfortunately there is no existing machinery whereby the fulfilment of these conditions can be made obligatory on candidates for a religious life. Even before we are half prepared, we begin the serious practice of religion. This often results in great confusion of thought and bitterness of failure. In fact, clear demarcation and regulation are not possible. The mind is an elusive thing ; it is extremely difficult to ascertain its real condition at any given time. It often deceives and leads us into paths wherein we may be scarcely fit to walk. Necessarily there is suffering. Further, the religious life, like any other vocation, is open to all. It naturally is tempting to many who are perhaps not yet ready. Hence, we must always think calmly and long before we embrace it, and provided we judge by the standard described above, we are certain not to go far astray.

II

SANDHYA-VANDANA AND KIRTANA

Our remarks towards the end of the last chapter may give rise to several questions. We have said therein: "As religion is not taken seriously by the majority of people, more tangible means, more appealing intermediaries, must be found for them and associated with religion." And we have mentioned morality, knowledge, service, etc. as those intermediaries. We have also said: "Spiritualisation of the concerns of life is all right. But most men can only slowly progress along that path without substantial aid from morality, art, knowledge, action, and service." These statements do not seem to be fully in accord with prevailing beliefs. Of course, no one denies the need of morality on the path to religion and in the religious life itself. But most men will argue that there are other convenient means of attaining to the fineness of perception, which, as we have said, is an essential condition of religious practice. At least three such distinct means may be mentioned: (1) Sandhyâ-vandanâ and such other daily and occasional practices; (2) the repetition and chanting of the names and praises of God or of some sacred formula; and (3) the practice of Prânâyâma.

We admit that these are efficacious means. We also have said: "The sincere observance of the forms and adherence to the beliefs are essentially necessary for him and play an important part in the evolution of his spiritual consciousness."

But we must not be easily led away by prevailing customs. The Sandhyâ ceremonies are not equally effective in all persons, though all equally observe the forms. Much depends on the mental condition of the persons practising them. Nothing is in vain. Even in the worst cases, such daily practices have an effect. The fact that a man detaches himself twice or thrice daily from his multifarious pursuits and sits quiet and silent for some minutes at a time, trying to concentrate his mind on supermundane realities, is itself significant. But without other substantial helps, such little doses will not cure the disease. What good will the Sandhyâvandanâ of a man do to him, if he passes the rest of the day in vicious and worldly pursuits? His daily activities themselves must be pure and exalted, if any appreciable progress is to be made towards religion. Herein lies the need of morality, art, etc. One is not asked to give up one's ceremonial practices. With the improvement of one's mind, these will become more and more potent and significant. But along with these, the culture of morality, knowledge, art, etc. is essential. These, of course, must be associated with religion to be truly effective.

We are discussing this question here, because there are many in India today—and for the matter of that, everywhere in the world, wherever religion is believed in and practised—who think that if they only continue with the prescribed practices, they will eventually reach the gate of Heaven. The gate of Heaven is not so easily attainable. It cannot be denied that a determined practice of rites and ceremonies produces some kind of power in man. For the matter of that, all kinds of concentration on subtle objects will produce a similar effect. But does man ever lack power? We always have more than enough of it. What we really need is not power, but sound judgment and the earnest desire to make a correct use of the power we already possess. And when we have learnt to utilise correctly the power that is already at our disposal, fresh powers will come to us of themselves. Cases often occur in which a man, having somehow acquired a little of supernormal power, becomes arrogant and does incalculable mischief to others and himself. Character is our sure guard at every point of the upward journey.

Similarly in the repetition and singing of the Holy names, Kirtana. The repetition or singing by itself is of little value. All depends on the state of the mind. If we repeat mechanically, it will have little effect. If we repeat with determination, but without a sufficiently purified mind, we may acquire some unusual power, but not any real spirituality. Every mind has a certain natural level of action and aspiration, according to which it feels and utilises whatever comes within its consciousness. Unless the natural levels of the mind is spiritual, we shall fail to be spiritually benefited by the supernormal powers we may acquire through determined efforts at concentration.

Shri Chaitanya prescribed that the names of the Lord should be sung by one who is humbler than even grass and patient like a tree, and who, being himself devoid of all sense of self-esteem, respects others sincerely. Here the essential conditions to make the singing of the Lord's names effective have been clearly laid down. We must read between the lines to understand their true significance. Mere outward humility and patience are not meant. Inner purification is essential. True humility comes only when we have risen high above worldly considerations, so that the standard of worldly judgment no longer affects us, and we feel in our inmost heart, every moment of our life, the presence of the Infinite, Omnipotent and Omniscient. Without at least a partial perception of spiritual immensity, real humility is impossible; it will be only mock humility. We must also distinguish between humility and timidity. In most cases our humility is only another form of timidity and ineffectuality: we are cowed by the immensity of powers playing around us, and feel that we cannot play up to such greatness. But the aspirant of God must not be cowed by worldly powers. He must rise above them. But is it easy to defy the world? We can then very well guess what a tremendous training the mind must pass through before the conditions as laid down by Shri Chaitanya can be properly fulfilled.

In India, especially in Bengal, we find people, whenever they think of becoming religious, taking to the protracted singing of the Lord's names. This is no doubt good. But in most cases, the necessity of fulfilling the preliminary conditions is completely forgotten. The result is hardly helpful. People become peculiar and unnaturally emotional. The consequences of such emotionalism were thus described by Swami Vivekananda, in course of a conversation with a disciple:

"During meditation, suppress the emotional side altogether. That (emotionalism) is a great source of danger. Those that are very emotional, have no doubt their Kundalini rushing quickly upwards, but it is as quick to come down as to go up. And when it comes down, it leaves the devotee in a state of utter ruin. It is for this reason that Kirtanas and other auxiliaries to emotional development have a great drawback. It is true that by dancing and jumping, etc., through a momentary impulse, that power is made to course upwards, but it is never enduring. On the contrary, when it traces back its course, it rouses violent lust in the individual. Listening to my lectures in America, through temporary excitement many among the audience used to get into an ecstatic state, and some would even become motionless like statues. But on inquiry I afterwards found that many of them had an excess of the carnal instinct immediately after that state."

Kirtana, singing of Divine names and praise, without mental preparation, has this danger. It evokes too much emotion which drags the mind down to dangerously low levels. And the ultimate result is more loss than gain. Yet it is this practice which is considered by many as a most efficacious means of becoming religious!

From what we have said about Sandhyâvandanâ or Kirtana, it must not be understood that we condemn them. In all conditions of our mind they are more or less efficacious, and when the mind has been purified and prepared, they are undoubtedly powerful means of spiritual advance. But, in our present earth-bound state, they are not enough to lead us to real religion. They must be powerfully aided by those auxiliaries that we have mentioned before—morality, art, knowledge, etc. If we think that we may neglect them and reach the portal of religion by means ot ritualistic practices alone, we are sadly mistaken.

III

PRANAYAMA

In the present chapter we propose to deal briefly with Prânâyâma. It is often thought that Prânâyâma is an effective means of attaining to subtle states of the mind, and that it not only prepares the mind for the serious practice of religion, but also easily leads the aspirant to the superconscious state. There is, no doubt, as much truth in this suggestion as in those we have discussed in the last chapter. But certain essential conditions to the success of Prânâyâma are often carelessly ignored. Prânâyâma has a glamour about it. It seems so easy of practice! And the results said to be derivable from it are truly irresistible. The common mind is easily deluded by the prospects. We must not forget that we are considering here the case of the ordinary man, not the man of pure mind and intense Vairâgya. Prânâyâma and such other Yogic practices have a tremendous fascination for a certain type of Westerner, and many Indians also fall an easy prey to them. We are eager for more and more power. And who does not know that Yoga can confer tremendous superhuman powers? So we begin the practice, with fatal results in most cases.

We shall not describe here the different processes of Prânâyâma. We are concerned here with the possible help it can give in the preparation for earnest religious life.

What are the relations between the body and the mind? Which is the master? Does the mind control the body or the body the mind? Many different explanations have been given. But we Hindus believe, that it is the mind that precedes the body and fashions and controls it, and not vice versa. As is the mind, so is the body. The Vâsanâs (desires) and Samskâras (traits and tendencies) are the constructive forces in body-building. Evil thought gives an evil aspect to a man's appearance. Pure thought confers on it an angelic beauty. This is common experience. But it cannot be denied that the body also influences and changes the mind. Our food, our environment, climate, illness, all these cast their influences on the mind.

Mere external influences, however, cannot much affect the mind. The body and the external objects modify the mind only to a certain extent. Beyond that, it is the mind, the inner Samskâras, that prevails. The fact is, a certain part of the mind is almost on the same plane as the body. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to explain how the mind and the body react on each other. But we feel that a certain part of the mind is in close connection and on the same level with the body ; and that if we produce the necessary changes in the body, the mind also changes in the desired direction. Hence the practice of Prânâyâma or breath-control.

Now, it has been found that the physical concomitant of pure and spiritual thought is rhythmic breathing and sometimes its complete cessation. If, therefore, we can practise rhythmic breathing and its perfect control, we may produce subtle and spiritual thoughts in the mind and eventually realise high psychical states. This seems to be a straight course. Things, however, do not happen so tamely and mechanically. The mind revolts. It refuses to be led by breathing tricks.

The brain and the nervous system occupy a very important position in the mechanism of the life and mind. We have mentioned the Hindu conviction that the mind moulds the body. The brain and the nervous system may be called the main and the best physical representatives of the mind. Our predominant mental traits and tendencies, Samskâras, not only give a peculiar mould to the grosser parts of the body, but also to the nerves and the brain. The nerves and the brain have the capacity to carry easily and perfectly only those ideas and feelings which are normal to the mind. They cannot easily convey abnormal or supernormal feelings and ideas. If we force them to do so, they may obey reluctantly for a time, but they will at last give way completely, and the results, physical and mental, will be disastrous.

Our mental life has to depend largely on the proper functioning of the nerves and the brain. We all know what happens to a man when even a tiny screw in his brain becomes loose. But we do not attach the necessary importance to the nerves. All true perceptions and knowledge, all feelings of joy and sorrow and other emotions with their various shades, all sense of power and fruition, hope, enthusiasm, purposefulness, all that constitute the essentials of a healthy life, are possible chiefly through healthy and strong nerves. When the nerves are disturbed or diseased, or when they are overstrained, life becomes miserable. It seems dreary, joyless, and aimless. It seems to be at a standstill, and death seems the only relief. This is true not only of our so-called normal, worldly life, but also and in a greater degree, of the spiritual life. In the spiritual life, we have to deal with very fine perceptions, ideas, motives, impulses, and emotions. Infinitely subtle are they and infinitely various are their forms. And it is no smooth sailing. We have carefully to check some and remould and nurture others. All this requires very strong and healthy nerves and brain. If we impair them in any way, even in the name of religion, we do incalculable harm to ourselves.

Prânâyâma, if it is practised unwisely, has every chance of ruining the nerves and the brain.

We have mentioned that if we compel the nerves and the brain to carry thoughts and emotions to which they are not inured, they eventually give way. When we regulate our breath and make it flow rhythmically, or when we completely hold it, we give rise to unwonted, subtle thoughts in the mind (we have already mentioned the intimate correspondence between breath and thought). These thoughts are not always pure and noble. There are many evil tendencies latent in us. They do not generally come under our observation, but they nevertheless exist in the mind. When they are forced up to the level of consciousness, they run riot in the mind; and we, with our feeble self-control, can hardly restrain them. They course hot through the nerves and the brain and wreck them, and the result is often sexual degeneration. The subtle good thoughts also equally impair the brain and the nerves. For, the nerves and the brain have all along been accustomed to gross perceptions. The intensity and power of the subtle thoughts become too much for them to bear. Thus the consequences of Prânâyâma, in both these respects, are ruinous. It is not enough to release subtle thoughts. We must not forget that if Prânâyâma wakes up the gods in us, it also wakes up the devils; and both gods and devils, when they are suddenly roused, are harmful to us.

Do we mean that Prânâyâma should never be practised by any one? No. Prânâyâma can be profitably practised only when we have been firmly established in moral character, when we have purged our mind of base desires and tendencies, when a high moral consciousness has become our normal level, when fine perceptions and emotions have become habitual to us, and when our nerves and brain have become accustomed to carrying subtle thoughts and emotions. That is to say, strenuous uphill work must be done before Prânâyâma can become a beneficial practice to us.

It has been repeatedly said in our books that Prânâyâma should never be practised except under the guidance of an expert teacher. It should never be practised seriously by anyone who is not observing Brahmacharya (continence). It will be too much for the weak nerves and brain of an incontinent person. In young age, when one is sexually pure and has moral fervour, one may benefit by a moderate practice of Prânâyâma. For then the mind is yet unformed, desires also have not waxed strong as they do with adolescence, and the nerves and the brain are fresh and healthy. A moderate practice then will have a beneficial effect.

From what we have said above, it will be clear that Prânâyâma can at best be only a secondary help to a worldly person in attaining that fineness of mind, which is an essential pre-requisite of a truly religious life.

IV

INTELLECTUALISM *VERSUS* SPIRITUALITY

From what we have hitherto said about the necessity for knowledge, art, work, etc., in the preparation for a religious life, some may be led to think that they are integral parts of spirituality. That, however, is a wrong conclusion. There are people, especially those who have been influenced by the Protestant culture of England, who hold that spirituality is a harmonious development of head, heart, and hand. They say that a religious ideal which excludes or does not emphasise the development of intellect and the faculty of activity is at best imperfect; and that mere culture of the heart is little good and abnormal. It is possible our previous chapters have been construed by some as advocating such a view. To think so, as we have said, would be an error.

This harmonious conception appeals to many. It appears so natural. But religion is nothing if not the reversal of what is called the natural. The habit and experience of countless lives have taught us to regard what is really unnatural as natural. No religion ever really says that the human soul is material or finite. Reason also dictates that the immaterial and the infinite must be beyond all definition, limitation, or want, and that the ways of the infinite can never be those of the finite. Yet we have been so befooled and deluded that our conception of the perfection often partakes of the nature of the limited and the imperfect. We resist the idea of the negation of our present nature. We magnify our imperfection and call it perfection.

The idea of the harmony of head, heart, and hand is an instance of this delusion. No doubt there is a stage in our spiritual progress, at which this harmony is beneficial and has to be practised. But it would be harmful to consider it to be the goal itself. Let us consider intellectualism. Shri Ramakrishna said : "In the Hindu almanac, it is mentioned that on a particular day there will be twenty *âdâs* (measure of capacity) of rain-water. But you will not be able to squeeze out of the almanac a single drop !" This saying of the Master goes to the very root of the matter. A map of a land is not the land itself. When we philosophise about God, we do not really perceive God. The concept of God is not God Himself. This distinction has to be clearly borne in mind. We must remember that reason or intellect is concerned with systematising the knowledge of things, not with *perceiving* them. But things must first be perceived. That is essential. We perceive external objects through sense-intuition, and mental objects through mental intuition; and then we systematise those perceptions, which is an indirect process. Similarly we must perceive the Spirit through spiritual intuition. That is religion. That is spirituality. So intellectualism and spiritual intuition cannot be identical. They are altogether distinct. All of us have heard how Sir J. C. Bose has demonstrated that plants have life and sensibilities. Sir J. C. Bose's experiments have given us the intellectual comprehension that plants feel as we feel. But we do not yet perceive them as so feeling. To perceive them as living and feeling we must raise our consciousness to a higher and subtler level. We must acquire superconscious perception. Otherwise the fact of plants being alive will ever remain with us a matter of intellectual conviction at best. To acquire the intellectual conviction, the manipulation of a few instruments is enough. But in order to perceive the life of plants, to feel plants as endowed with happiness and sorrow, joy and suffering, we have to acquire a new kind of perception. Therein lies a fundamental difference between intellectualism and spirituality.

In order to be religious, what is essential is the development of a new power of perception, whereby we come to know the universe not as material and mental, but as spiritual. Intellect is not that power. Therefore intellectualism does not help us spiritually. Hence we find that even giants of intellect are sometimes babies spiritually. Intellect is satisfied with the appearances of things. Spirituality penetrates beyond the appearances and reaches the heart of things, which is Divinity. We have said that one fundamental difference between intellect and religion is that the former is concerned with the conception of things and the latter with their perception. But that perception should be not of external aspects but of the very essence, which is always Divine. This, then, is another great difference between intellectualism and spirituality.

A third difference lies in the difference of the personal attitude towards Reality, as implied by intellect and religion. Intellect reduces even a living thing to an idea; religion makes even an idea a living thing. God, to intellect, is a concept; to religion, the soul of one's soul. In religion, we seek to realise Reality which appears to our present experience as a half material, half living universe, as the Eternal Person endowed with infinite consciousness. This differentiates religion essentially from intellectualism.

If spirituality is so different from intellectualism, why did we recommend the pursuit of knowledge as a preparation for religion? The reason is obvious. The utility of knowledge is more or less negative in character. We want knowledge not for any positive gain, but to rid ourselves of the gross side of our nature, to reach a state of refinement where we can usefully and efficiently take up the culture of spirituality. When our mind has become fine enough, when through knowledge, activity, aesthetic and moral culture, and social service, our mind has become averse to sense-enjoyment, it longs for spiritual realities and searches for the One in the many. Then the time has come to take to new ways, to turn a sharp corner, to give up our habitual outlook on life and things and develop a new, the spiritual, outlook. In fact, by then, our mind has already unconsciously developed new ways. A new vision has been slowly rising of itself. What we have to do now is to leave off the old ways altogether and perfect the new vision. The world must now be completely forgotten. No more book-learning or intellectual gymnastics. No more so-called social service and moral idealism and aestheticism. Now to know God, to drink deep of His love and to be for ever lost in Him, and to that end, to eradicate all feelings from our mind except the consciousness of God. Who cares for head and hand now? The heart is the temple of God. Is there room for philosophy in the communion of lovers? In order to love a man, do we require a knowledge of physiology, anatomy, or biology?

It is a partial vision that looks upon head and hand as necessary associates of heart in the realisation of perfect spirituality. What place is there for much knowledge in that realisation which is of the One? The knowledge of the many has no place there. It is only where the phenomenal world exists, that a knowledge of phenomena is useful. But where the manifold world is non-existent, there so-called knowledge is out of place. Such knowledge does not help us in the least to gain spiritual realisation. And work? Work is possible only in our present condition of existence and knowledge. This condition, however, is due to our spiritual ignorance and has to be transcended.

Of course we are here speaking of the culmination itself. At the intermediate stages, we cannot altogether do without the exercise of head and hand; in fact, it is beneficial and necessary, as we shall see later. What we are trying to do here is to indicate the nature of the state we must attempt to reach and the true value of intellectualism and the like. For many days yet, we shall have to play a double game, and, while feeling its ultimate worthlessness, we must yet utilise it for the realisation of the higher spiritual vision. It, therefore, must not be understood that as soon as we have reached the stage of refinement where we can seriously take to religion, we are to give up all intellectual culture and become credulous fools. There are people who become fools in the name of religion. Because it is said that God cannot be realised through the intellect, they jump to the conclusion that religious matters must be without any reason and that to become credulous fools is the first step of spiritual progress. Religion is nothing of the kind. Once for all let us clearly realise that, although religion cannot be attained through reason or intellectualism but only through the development of a distinct spiritual intuition, the ways and conclusions of religion are never irrational. If irrational and foolish things are presented in the name of religion, we may fearlessly discard them as nonsense. But of course we must judge calmly and carefully before we so discard them.

At all events the time has not yet arrived, when we can dispense with intellectualism. That time will come when we shall feel an overwhelming love for God, or at least when we shall be firmly established in the knowledge of the ideal we want to grasp and its pros and cons and ways and means. For unless there is an unassailable conviction about the ideal in our mind, serious and uninterrupted practice is not possible. We are bound to be disturbed by conflicting ideas. Today occultism, tomorrow theosophy, on the third day another *ism* will come and disturb us, and we shall be tossed about like a shuttlecock. Not only the conflicting attractions of different religious views and philosophies, but also secular ideals are bound to be disturbing. In these days people are so intimately associated with social, economical, political, cultural, national, and international movements that unless their religious ideals are conceived in harmony with them, these other interests have every chance of interrupting the even flow of their religious life. Hence the urgent need for a thorough intellectual grasp of one's religious ideal in all its details and bearings.

We thus see three different evaluations of intellectualism. In the first stage, its culture is positively beneficial as it leads to the refinement of mind. In the second stage, we feel that it does not lead to spiritual knowledge proper, which we have to acquire through quite a different kind of perception, the spiritual intuition or Yoga-shakti. But though we feel the ultimate worthlessness of intellectualism, we still have to cultivate it, until we are engulfed by the overwhelming love of

God, in order to be fully convinced of the truth and value of our chosen spiritual ideal so that there may not be any subsequent conflict. In the third stage, our mind has become thoroughly concentrated. We want to realise and love God alone and forget everything else. The world seems trash. Intellectualism is then an obstruction and painful.

V

ON THE THRESHOLD

For a long time yet, we have to play the double game. It must not be thought that even when one has overcome Tamas and acquired fineness of perception or has become unselfish and serviceful, it is possible to give up all worldly quests and devote oneself solely to a religious life. Alas, alas, it is too difficult a life to be so easily accessible. A serious practice of religion must in most cases be begun together with a worldly life. That is to say, we must not give up external activities all of a sudden. The mind will stubbornly refuse to embrace religion at once and completely. So it is necessary to wean the mind gradually from its accustomed conditions.

On the threshold of religious life, we have to be very careful about two points: (1) whether our desire for religion is genuine or only a "false hunger"; and (2) whether we shall be able to continue our pursuit of religion with unfaltering enthusiasm to the last.

The desire for religion can be conveniently called Vairâgya (lit. detachment from worldly things). Without Vairâgya there can be no religion. What is Vairâgya? It is detachment from worldly concerns and joys, and desire for the spiritual. Not only should our mind not wish for earthly things, it should also conceive an instinctive dislike for them. And there must be at the same time a hankering after God. Of course in the beginning, that hankering may not be quite explicit and the object of that hankering quite definite. But there must be a sense of dissatisfaction and uneasiness. Existing conditions must prove uncomfortable and distasteful. This is the sign. This nausea may come suddenly or may come imperceptibly. Those who are regular and sincere in the observance of ritualistic religion and daily prayers, will find themselves, some of them, gradually being led to the borders of finer regions attended with a higher consciousness and joy. And the mind having glimpsed them from afar will be filled with a nostalgic fervour for those higher states. Their desire for them will grow slowly and steadily. But the higher consciousness may also come suddenly.

Here we have to be very careful. The sudden desire for religion may be merely adventitious, occasioned by a bereavement, disappointment, or disease. It may be that a dear one has died. The mind may react violently and may conceive the world to be unreal. It often happens that in such circumstances, people take to religion and sometimes put on the ochre cloth and become mendicants. Not that such steps are absolutely wrong. Sometimes it happens that some emotional shock rends asunder our bondage and does us permanent spiritual good. But more often we only yield to a momentary feeling. Such a religion and renunciation would only be false. And after some wandering, we shall return home and surrender ourselves to the joys of the flesh with redoubled vigour. It is then simply a waste of time and energy. We must not, under the stress of those extraordinary conditions, take any decisive step. We must stick to the forms of the old life. That does not mean that we are to crush or starve the religious fervour we may then feel. On the contrary, we should feed it by all means in our power. We should certainly become as deeply religious in thought and practice as possible, but without taking any extreme step. For religion, cultivated under any circumstances, for any length of time, must prove beneficial. But extreme measures are not good. They will also mean, when reaction sets in, an extreme revulsion of feeling.

So much for Vairâgya due to bereavement. But the Vairâgya caused by worldly failure or disease is still more despicable. Such people are constantly met with in real life. The best thing they can do is to try their utmost within their natural limits. They must strive more vigorously for wealth and position and not run after God. And if they are diseased, the physician should be their first and foremost God.

When, therefore, one feels inclined to devote oneself to religion, one must carefully inquire into the motive. The mind is a great deceiver and it can very cleverly camouflage the most sordid motives with golden tints. We must find out the real conditions after long and careful observation. If we find that our Vairâgya is genuine, we may hopefully take the next step. But if our inquiry reveals a suspicious state of things, the best course is to continue the old life, until all dross has eventually been eliminated. It is extremely dangerous to build the spiritual life on doubtful foundations. We shall have to pay for it very dearly afterwards. The basis must be well and truly laid without any weakness anywhere. On that alone can the spiritual life really be built.

When we have found our spiritual longing to be genuine, our next step should be to judge the strength of that longing. Much depends on a correct determination of this. For according to its strength, the mode of our life will have to be chosen. If we expect it to last through life, the best course is to renounce the world formally. But if we are not sure of such permanency, we must not so renounce. We must continue in the world, tasting its sweets and its bitters, till our mind has become sufficiently pure.

One mistake is often made by the young. The young have a comparatively pure mind. Naturally when the first ebullition of spiritual enthusiasm comes, they give up their daily routine work and avidly surrender themselves to it. Students neglect their studies. Others, again, their household duties. At first such dereliction does not seem harmful. But in the long run, in most cases, the result is decidedly bad. Students especially should be very careful. As long as the mind is fresh, spiritual emotions seem to be all in all; and the necessity for intellectual culture seems too mundane. But when they enter the world, face its stern realities and receive their cruel buffetings, they find themselves mentally weak and discover that they have wasted their student days. Repentance follows. Life then does not seem sufficiently helpful. We have seen the lives of many bright students being thus wasted. When they feel a hankering for spiritual truths, students should always try to harmonise it with their regular duties. They must never allow their emotions to run riot and upset the even course of life. Such discipline, though apparently a check to enthusiasm, will in fact strengthen the desire for spirituality and heighten the emotions. Perhaps at the close of our student days we shall renounce the world. Even so intellectual discipline and knowledge will prove very useful in the pure life of religion. It at least teaches us rigorous habits without which spiritual life is a mockery. And if perchance we enter the world, the knowledge and efficiency acquired will prove an asset, and there will not be any break between the life of the world and the spiritual life.

One point we must very clearly and deeply impress upon ourselves: Spiritual life is very slow uphill work, it is a cruel drudgery, and is for eternity. Somehow most of us have the idea, however subconscious it may be, that spirituality is something to be acquired in a brief space of time and then will follow a long holiday with leisured enjoyment. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Spiritual life is for all eternity, that is to say, there is no such holiday as we contemplate. The same high tone of mind has to be continually maintained, without the slightest relaxation. The same watchfulness, the same caution, and the same rigour. So we have to prepare ourselves as a man facing capital punishment—there can be no revocation and return. That grim calmness is a *sine qua non.* If we remember this fact, we shall not allow our mind to be content with merely pleasurable action or emotion. We shall feel that the training of mind to regular habits is more urgent in spiritual life than indulgence in superfine emotions. Young people should carefully remember this and guard themselves accordingly.

Naturally it will be found that not all who feel spiritual longings are fit or destined to renounce the world or devote themselves exclusively to religion. Most of them will have to continue the culture of spirituality along with worldly avocations. They will have to play the double game. They will have so to perform their worldly duties that these may not prove antagonistic to their spiritual life and may, on the other hand, prove helpful. Of course this problem and its solution will be different with different people. The problem of the married will be different from that of the unmarried. The solution also will be different in each case.

VI

WHEN SHALL WE RENOUNCE?

When is one in a condition to renounce the world? This is an important question. Much of the success of spiritual life depends on a correct answer to it. If we renounce when we have not yet acquired fitness for it, failure will be writ large on our future. Dryness and despair will overtake us and the mind will go astray. If we are fit, and yet do not renounce, we shall waste precious qualifications and shall be deprived of that spiritual glory which otherwise might be ours.

Yet it is true that it is very difficult to give a correct reply to the above question. Various answers have been given to it by various people. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly said that a beggar cannot renounce. Only one who possesses worldly powers or prosperity can renounce. Renunciation by one who has nothing is meaningless. Does this mean that unless one is materially prosperous, one cannot renounce? No. What the Swami meant is that a man must have the requisite power and energy within him for the acquisition of earthly glory. There must be the consciousness of that power. There must be that sense of triumph; and not the sense of fear and defeat and flight. This is cowardice, and cowards are ill fitted to embrace the life of renunciation. This inner consciousness of power was meant by Swami Vivekananda. And when we have that, we choose to employ it for spiritual purposes, we withdraw it from the world, and then it is renunciation. Worldly people have the idea that they are capable of managing the so-called affairs of the world more efficiently than monks. That is a delusion. Monks possess a power which if they employ it in the discharge of so-called worldly duties, makes them more than a match for the most astute of the worldly wise. And why? Because they have not escaped from the world by the backdoor, but have scaled its heights and soared into the golden empyrean.

And one who sincerely watches his mind can easily discover whether he has acquired that inner power and sense of victory. If he has, then it is a sign for renunciation. He will prosper in the new life.

There is another sign which we consider to be very sure and comprehensive. The average man is full of desire, especially for sexual enjoyment and earthly power. He is ever athirst for them. He eagerly seeks to possess the objects of sense-enjoyment. His whole life and energy are devoted to their pursuit. If he is debarred from enjoying them or acquiring them, he will become mad and eventually die. But all people do not share this nature. There are some few who have reached a higher state. They do not seek for sense-enjoyment. Their mind is generally turned inwards. But they are not yet free from evil Samskâras. They have the desire for enjoyment latent in their minds. So whenever any object of enjoyment approaches them, their mind is disturbed, and goes forward to enjoy it. If, however, they turn away from it, their mind calms down and goes inwards again. Such men, if they do not come in contact with the external objects of enjoyment, may after a time rid themselves of their bad Samskâras and eventually transcend all desire. In that exalted state, they will not be affected even if sensual pleasures are thrust upon them. Their mind will never lose its calm and poise and will always remain fixed in the Âtman.

Of course, people who have reached this last stage are the best fitted to renounce. In fact, they have already done so. They are already free. For them renunciation will mean only a formal change. Their number, however, is very, very small, and we need not consider them on the present occasion. The middle class, those who live above desires when aloof from external objects of enjoyment, are the persons who concern us most. Such persons indeed are fit to renounce. Let us watch ourselves. If we find that when we are not in contact with the objects of enjoyment, we do not feel any desire for them, we may be sure that we are in a position to renounce. Renunciation will then be extremely helpful to us. This is the sign. If our mind hankers for sense-objects, even when they are not perceived, we may be certain that we are not yet ready. We must plod on in the world until the mind becomes sufficiently pure.

External renunciation is necessary and beneficial. Some there are who argue that only internal renunciation is necessary. They are self-deceived. If we are to grow spiritually, we must keep the mind free from the agitations of desire. Most spiritual aspirants belong to the middle group. They feel all right when they are not in contact with the objects of desire, when they live away from them. Such a favourable situation cannot be created without external renunciation.

The greatest hindrance to renunciation is lust. Because of this, people seek mates, and this in turn creates a household with its innumerable obligations, ties, and miseries. The mind, therefore, should be carefully observed as regards lust. Is it free from it? Or how strong is the passion? As we have indicated above, the condition of renunciation is not necessarily absolute freedom from lust. This absolute freedom, Shri Ramakrishna said again and again, cannot come without the realisation of God. Till one has realised God, lust will remain to a greater or less degree. But we must observe whether the mind hankers after the satisfaction of lust, or if it is agitated only when the objects of passion are near at hand. In the latter case renunciation is safe. If one avoids those objects, and lives in a pure atmosphere, the latent Samskâras can easily be controlled and slowly eradicated.

Apart from these inner conditions external conditions must also be considered. Swami Vivekananda thus explained Sannyâsa in course of a lecture in America :

"When a man has fulfilled the duties and obligations of that stage of life in which he is born, and his aspirations lead him to seek a spiritual life, and to abandon altogether the worldly pursuits of possession, fame, or power, when by the growth of insight into the nature of the world, he sees its impermanence, its strife, its misery, and the paltry nature of its prizes, and turns away from these, then he seeks the True, the Eternal Love, and the Refuge. He makes complete renunciation (Sannyâsa) of all worldly position, property and name, and wanders forth into the world to live a life of self-sacrifice, and to persistently seek spiritual knowledge, striving to excel in love and compassion, and to acquire lasting insight. Gaining these pearls of wisdom by years of meditation, discipline, and inquiry, he in his turn becomes a teacher, and hands on to disciples, lay or professed, who may seek them from him, all that he can of wisdom and beneficence."

The Swami says : "When a man has fulfilled the duties and obligations of that stage of life in which he is born." The duties of our present life have to be fulfilled, before we can renounce. There are two aspects of this prescription. As to the external, i.e. domestic and social, one cannot perhaps ever completely fulfil them. One idea (which is very prevalent in the South) is that one should not renounce till one has married and brought forth a son. The idea is no doubt to perpetuate the family and the family-culture as a factor of social well-being. But to seek to fulfil this condition is always dangerous. One who has once tasted sexual joy, will find it very hard to relinquish it afterwards. The little Vairâgya that he might have before, will vanish with the enjoyment of conjugal felicity. There is also no knowing when duties will come to an end. Duties are an interminable chain. One link produces another. One must break loose.

Generally speaking, there is no automatic freedom. The Swami's prescription, therefore, should be taken more in its internal, psychological aspect than in the external. So long as we feel that we have not done our duty by our relations, and so long as the consciousness of this defection pricks our conscience, it is better for us not to renounce. For if we do so, our mind will always hark back, and secretly dwell on the sufferings of those we have left behind, and this will weaken it, and impede our pursuit of the new life. We must, therefore, first and foremost be sure of our own mind. Unless there is a burning desire for God-realisation, so much so that we feel that we shall die unless we renounce the world, the thought of our dear ones' suffering will always prove a hindrance to our spiritual progress. We must be sure that those who are dependent upon us do not suffer from want of food and other necessaries of life when we renounce. That is enough. Mental suffering they will surely have, but it is impossible to make provisions for that.

There are some stock arguments against renunciation which may be briefly considered here. One is that God's creation cannot continue unless people marry. There cannot be a more stupid argument than this. First of all, very few renounce. The celibacy of a handful of persons cannot affect God's creation. Secondly, how do we know that it is our duty to maintain God's creation? Did God ever say that? If God creates, He also destroys. Both are equally important to Him. Thirdly, man's supreme duty is to know and love God. A man who is attached to the world, can never know and love God. Man's sole aim is to realise God in everything. How can one who aspires after that realisation, make a brute of himself with regard to a woman?

A second argument is that a man must marry in order to please his parents and provide them with a daughter-in-law to cherish and serve them. This also is a foolish argument. Parents cannot always be satisfied. No one is bound so to satisfy them. With regard to service, why, one can oneself attend to them so long as they live. Parents do not live for ever. Some day they will pass away. One will then be entirely free. For the service of parents, marriage is not necessary.

A third argument is more real. It is that it is best to marry so long as there are sexual instincts in the mind. We have already said that if the instincts are too strong, marriage is desirable. But if they are feeble, one should not be unnerved and place the noose of wedlock round one's neck. Indulgence of sexual passions will not rid one of them. There may be external pacification through marriage, but not that victory over them, which we seek.

The question is often asked: "Shall I renounce?" Yes, renunciation is the most natural course. We are born alone, we die alone. We must also live alone. That is natural. To marry and beget children is really unnatural. But a man must be fit to renounce. We have indicated the means of judging this fitness. Let us watch our mind and see what it wants and how it behaves. If it does not want enjoyment unless the objects of desire are near it, we may safely renounce. But let us also consider external conditions, if our Vairâgya is not too strong. Let nobody suffer from want of physical necessities because of our renunciation. Let us also see if renunciation will make us feel guilty of neglecting our duty. We must carefully consider these points. Otherwise the mind will be enfeebled and our pursuit of the new life will be lame and half-hearted.

VII

IS RENUNCIATION NECESSARY?

At this point, it may be profitable to discuss the necessity of renunciation. Many fight shy of renunciation. Various arguments are put forward to prove its uselessness and even harmfulness. In the preceding chapter, we have shown that the stock arguments against celibacy are mostly stupid and meaningless. Celibacy is the very basis of spiritual power. Without it no great progress in spirituality is possible. And without renunciation true celibacy is almost impracticable.

Is renunciation necessary for progress in spiritual life? All religions and genuine religious teachers agree that without mental renunciation it is impossible to attain God-realisation or Divine love. They are all emphatic upon this point. Of course, we hear now and then of crusades against renunciation by some of the modern teachers, but they are all invariably pseudo-sensualists. They may be great in other respects, but it is our habit to consider a great man great in every respect. If there is a great poet, we at once dub him a saint. If there is a great intellectual, we at once consider him a

Rishi. And whatever he says on any subject, we accept as gospel truth. We forget that a man may be great in many respects, and yet may be a veritable baby as regards religion. Religion is not the spinning of ideas. It is assiduous *practice* and *realisation.* There are moderns posing as teachers, who belittle renunciation, because they themselves are still in the grip of desire. But all genuine teachers, past and present, are unanimous with regard to the need for at least inner renunciation. They all agree that the knowledge of the not-Self or the phenomenal world and attachment to it are the very antithesis of Divine knowledge and Divine love. The two are not on the same plane, the one does not lead to the other. We must give up all consciousness of and desire for earthly things in order to know God and attain Him. So long as we have the slightest desire for anything other than God, we cannot have Him.

We are often misled by our desires. They do not always appear in their true colours. They sometimes assume holy attire and lead us to believe that they are spiritual. There are many subtle desires in the mind, of which we know nothing at present. When the present gross desires have been eradicated, the subtle ones will emerge. Only Sâdhakas, those who have renounced the objects of gross desire, can know them. Two are the greatest and basic enemies of spirituality—Kâma (lust) and Kânchana (gold). These passions can and do take variegated forms. The motives of thought and action should always be analysed. Even desire for service, apparently so noble, may sometimes be nothing but a veiled form of lust and passion for possession. We have, therefore, to be on the watch every moment of our life.

Apart from these dangers of delusion, there is also danger from false philosophy. The modern age is predominantly materialistic. Materialism also has its finer forms. There is a materialism which is frank and open. It says that there is no God, no soul, no hereafter; that a man is nothing but the body; therefore, eat, drink, and be merry. This kind of materialism has no longer much hold on men. But there is a subtle materialism which says that God alone is not enough, there must be the universe beside Him. To know God alone is, according to the votaries of this creed, imperfection—perfection is to know the universe along with God. And they advance many subtle arguments in support of their thesis. If reason and the teachings of other great teachers do not support them, they have no hesitation in accusing them of ignorance. We have known persons who call in question even the knowledge of the great Shankara! They say that there is a plane of mind where reason does not prevail. Things happen there, which we cannot evaluate by reason. There Self and not-Self coexist, God and the world are inter-linked ; and that is the highest state. This statement is very misleading. It is true that God is beyond reason and that we cannot reach the superconscious plane through reason. But it does not therefore follow that things on that high plane are irrational. Swami Vivekananda clearly stated that though the superconscious cannot be attained through reason, it is not against reason. All great teachers have upheld this view.

We can soon discover the errors in this school of thought. All admit that the mind is limited and that Brahman is beyond mind. So long as the mind remains, "knowledge" of Brahman is impossible. We have to go beyond it. Where there is no mind, how can there be a world? Without the mind, the world cannot exist, for it is not an independent existence. Its existence is dependent on its knower. Perhaps the pseudo-materialist will say: "That may seem very true from a logical standpoint. But reality is alogical. It does not abide by the laws of logic. So your arguments do not apply to it. We can know Brahman and the world at the same time." But if reality is above logic, our mind and knowledge are not. And it is after all *we* who are to know

God. We cannot transcend our own nature. And our nature in its last limit is such that it cannot dwell on this alogical ground. In perfect reason alone is its stability, it cannot subsume contradictory principles at the same time; there is no rest for it until it has reached unbroken unity. This fact has been confirmed by repeated experience of Sâdhakas and Siddhas (those who strive and those who have realised).

What is spirituality? It is the complete cessation of Vrittis, mental modifications. The universe, subjectively speaking, is nothing but an aggregate of Vrittis. Spiritual progress consists in reducing the number of these Vrittis, until the Vritti relating to God alone remains in the mind. We reach this state through concentration and meditation. We reduce the Vrittis one by one. We concentrate the mind on one single object of meditation. Other Vrittis gradually die away and only the God-Vritti remains. This is not, however, the culmination. We have to go a step further. The last Vritti also has to be destroyed. When that is done, Brahman alone remains. Mind dies. What remains none can tell. The Upanishad declares that "words with mind turn back without attaining It". Here also we find that God and the world cannot coexist. For to know the world the world-Vritti must be in the mind. But the moment the world-Vritti arises in the mind, the God-Vritti will vanish. For the God-Vritti cannot arise in the mind until the whole mind has become one. Only the entire mind, unruffled by any other Vritti, can reflect the reality of God. The fact is, the opposition between Brahman and the world cannot be overcome in any way. There is a mysterious gulf between them, which is unbridgeable. This new philosophy of the alliance of God and the world should, therefore, be viewed with suspicion. It is better and safer to be on the side of reason and the host of ancient and modern sages than on that of unreason and crypto-materialists.

Why are they so eager to link God with the world? Because they have a secret, maybe unconscious, desire for the world. Their renunciation is not complete. Their mind is not yet fully ready for God. Hence this eager attempt at refuting the Mâyâ-vâda (theory of the unreality of the world) and proving the eternity of the world. Time will show the falsity of this philosophy. It has not come from actual spiritual experience and is little better than intellectual nonsense.

So renunciation is necessary. All teachers, therefore, emphasise at least mental renunciation. We must so train the mind that it can give up its outward tendency and its attachment to worldly things, and learn to dwell constantly on

God. Wherever we may be, in whatever condition, we must learn to be unattached to everything else but God. Distractions will come in the name of national service, of the service of man, of kindness and pity, of intellectual ideals. He who wants God must rise above all these. They are excellent things, no doubt, but they must be attended to by those who are still attached to the world. To them they will be a help. But those who have felt in their heart of hearts that God alone is real, must forget all except God and devote their entire mind and energy to His realisation. The modern mind is apt to judge even God-realisation by its effect on society, the nation and humanity. This is obviously a wrong attitude and is due to the prevalent materialism. The reverse is the truth: we must judge everything by its capacity to give us God-realisation.

VIII

EXTERNAL RENUNCIATION

Is external renunciation also necessary? Is not mental renunciation enough? Our opinion is that inner renunciation is not enough. One reason is obvious. Our external behaviour is the expression of our thoughts and motives. If we renounce internally, it must express itself outwardly as well, if we are sincere. He who has no world, no family inside, cannot have them outside. He becomes like a dry leaf swept by the wind of God's will. He wanders about unattached to any fixed set of persons or places. He cannot have a home. If we find any difference between the inside and the outside, between thought and behaviour, we may know that somewhere there is a flaw in the internal renunciation ; it is not yet complete and sincere.

But this is ideal renunciation. We admit that there may be persons who are sufficiently unattached in the mind, though they are still in the world. Their number is very small ; and they should be looked upon more as exceptions than the general rule. King Janakas are not plentiful. We should not make him our ideal ; for it is extremely difficult to follow and realise.

We shall more often fail than succeed. If we can, we must take to normal and natural, that is, to both internal and external, renunciation. But if we are so circumstanced that we cannot formally renounce, we must then try to realise the Janaka-ideal, however difficult it may be, since we have no other choice.

We shall discuss here only the case of those who can renounce. Is it necessary for them to renounce externally? Has such renunciation any special value? We would ask our readers to remember in this connection what we said about the fitness for and conditions of external renunciation in a previous chapter. We would ask them to recall the condition of mind that we stated was favourable to renunciation. If they do, they will at once discover why we insist on formal renunciation. We said that there is a state of mind, in which the mind by itself does not hanker after the objects of enjoyment, but that if those objects are contiguous, the mind is disturbed and yearns to grab them. If we are convinced that our sole aim is to free the mind completely from desire, we must, in that condition of mind, live far off from the objects of desire. We must physically go out of society, family and the company of women and children. After all, villages and towns are pre-eminently places of enjoyment—we use the word in a broad sense. In them practically all men and women are seeking self-gratification, either consciously or unconsciously, grossly or finely. Constant contact with them and with the objects of enjoyment which abound everywhere, will unconsciously drag the mind down to the level of self-gratification. The best course for a man, intent on spiritual self-realisation, is to retire from the habitations of householders and dwell apart. He should live in the company of those who have already renounced and in association with things and activities which are pre-eminently spiritual.

To live in the world and yet to grow in the spirit of renunciation means a tremendous waste of energy and failure more often than not. There is a constant struggle. The mind will be disturbed by low desires if it is always coming in contact with their objects. And it will have to be constantly pulled back to a safe level. This eternal play will go on—the sliding down of the mind and the drawing of it up. The energy that should be devoted to the realisation of God, will thus be spent in looking after the mind. Hence, there will be little spiritual progress. It is a nerve-racking business—this struggle with the mind. Heaven knows the mind is sufficiently untractable even without outside stimulus. Constant struggle with the mind leads to neurosis; and this is dangerous. If we are sincere and serious, we must, therefore, retire from the world externally as well as internally.

We often come across serene-minded householders, who appear undisturbed by passion and quite self-poised. There are a few who are really highly developed, but, as we have said, they are exceptional. Most of those who appear peaceful are not really so. In the first place, appearances are often deceptive and in the second, there is a psychological reason why they appear outwardly calm. It is that they have the constant subconscious knowledge that the objects of enjoyment are within their possession. This consciousness of possession naturally keeps the mind calm. It is not that we want to enjoy them every minute of the twenty-four hours, but that we want to possess them every moment. Take away from an apparently calm person the objects of his enjoyment, and you will find that he has lost his peace of mind—his nature is completely changed. When you renounce, your mind becomes unusually sensitive about enjoyment. Desires appear much stronger and more hideous than when you were in the world. They appear in all their hitherto potential power and ugliness. Then the real fight begins and you have to win the battle. In the world, these subtle forms have hardly any occasion or opportunity to appear to the conscious mind, for it already abounds in gross forms. We often congratulate ourselves on the conquest of desires simply by minimising the gross desires, because we do not know that the subtle desires are lurking like wild animals in the subconscious regions of the mind. External renunciation makes them rise to the surface, and then they can be fought and conquered.

This is not the only reason why we should renounce. There are certain ideals which every man aspiring after God-realisation has to try to follow and realise. For they are the emanations of God Himself. We have to become absolutely unselfish. We must practise and realise universal love. We must be fearless and truthful. These are all concomitants of Divine realisation. We cannot hope to realise God without becoming all these. But can we be truly unselfish, living in the world? A householder may give to charities. But he must necessarily devote his best energies and resources to the service of his parents, wife, children, relations, and friends. Although from the standpoint of the householder such preference is a duty and not reprehensible, from the higher standpoint of one who is seeking to realise God, it is far short of the whole duty of man. Any distinction between relatives and other persons is born of ignorance and physical attachment, and contradicts Divine knowledge. There is always an urge in us to remove this distinction.

He who surrenders to this urge, eventually goes out of the world. But most persons drown the voice of their conscience in their love for their own. They devote the best part of themselves to their wives and children and relatives, and care little for the suffering millions outside their families. How can even internal renunciation be possible in such a life, not to speak of God-realisation? A householder can never practise universal love. The very mode of his life is a contradiction. To love all, one must serve all equally. A householder, however spiritual, cannot do so.

Spirituality cannot come without a true estimate of the value of things. We confuse values. A seer knows that the world has no value; it is unsubstantial, empty, and insignificant. Its grandeur, its societies, its governments, its powers, are as nothing. We must grow to this consciousness, if we want to be spiritual. That is, we must have a keen sense of freedom. We must never feel that we are bound to anything or to any person. Absolute freedom—that is the ideal. Can a householder ever feel and realise it? He cannot. The moment a man attaches any value to things or persons, the moment he wants to possess them, that moment he comes under the jurisdiction of society, government, conventions, customs, and vulgar criticism. He is no longer free to do what he feels to be right. He has to submit to other powers than his conscience. His thoughts, words, and deeds must be guarded lest they jeopardise the interests of his family, relations, friends, and community. It is impossible for him to stand by truth alone. He can antagonise society only when he is confident of the protection of another society. Real freedom, real fearlessness, and real truthfulness can never belong to one who is hampered by family or earthly possessions. Only a Sannyâsin can have them. We do not mean that all Sannyâsins succeed. But they have the *opportunity* to realise them. Householders have not, even if they want to realise them. These qualities can only be acquired through constant practice whether by a householder or a Sannyâsin.

And above all, power. Tremendous power is necessary for the conquest of the turbulent mind and the defeat of the inexorable Mâyâ. That power can never be acquired without renunciation. Freedom alone gives power. The mind must be absolutely free to be powerful. This freedom is so precious to a spiritual aspirant that when one of his young disciples entered into a service, Shri Ramakrishna wept aloud in the bitter agony of his heart, and said that he would not have been more pained to hear of his death. Indeed the full growth of spiritual life, even the fullness of manhood, is impossible without external renunciation.

We must last of all mention that the true import of renunciation can never be felt until it has actually taken place. No effort of imagination can bring its significance to one who is still in the world, married or unmarried. A new world is revealed when the Rubicon has been crossed. That world is known only to the man who has renounced.

IX

IS HUMAN LOVE A HELP?

Is human love a help or a hindrance to spiritual progress? This is a question which occurs to many minds and a consideration of it will not be without value. No categorical reply can possibly be given to it. First of all, what is human love? Different minds hold different ideas about it. With some the distinction between men and God has been obliterated. Their spiritual realisations are so high that to them nothing exists but God. Everything to them is Divine. There are others again, to whom love is basely carnal. For these two classes of people, the question is easy to answer. The former class are already men of Self-realisation; and when they love men, there is nothing unspiritual in their love. And with the latter class, human love is naturally the very antithesis of spirituality, and would certainly impede all spiritual progress.

But the question is significant in the case of persons between these two extremes. They are in doubt. They do not know which is which. And it is their case that we should specially consider in this connection. But before we directly answer fullness of manhood, is impossible without external renunciation.

We must last of all mention that the true import of renunciation can never be felt until it has actually taken place. No effort of imagination can bring its significance to one who is still in the world, married or unmarried. A new world is revealed when the Rubicon has been crossed. That world is known only to the man who has renounced.

IX

IS HUMAN LOVE A HELP?

Is human love a help or a hindrance to spiritual progress? This is a question which occurs to many minds and a consideration of it will not be without value. No categorical reply can possibly be given to it. First of all, what is human love? Different minds hold different ideas about it. With some the distinction between men and God has been obliterated. Their spiritual realisations are so high that to them nothing exists but God. Everything to them is Divine. There are others again, to whom love is basely carnal. For these two classes of people, the question is easy to answer. The former class are already men of Self-realisation; and when they love men, there is nothing unspiritual in their love. And with the latter class, human love is naturally the very antithesis of spirituality, and would certainly impede all spiritual progress.

But the question is significant in the case of persons between these two extremes. They are in doubt. They do not know which is which. And it is their case that we should specially consider in this connection. But before we directly answer the question, it is necessary to lay down the fundamental principles of spirituality.

What is spirituality? What is the aim and end of our life? What is the Truth? What is the Eternal Reality? Wherein lies the Peace Everlasting? For the solution of all spiritual questions these facts have to be clearly determined beforehand. It is sometimes said that our aim in life is to become a fellow-worker of God. To us it seems almost blasphemous. Does God wait for any fellow-worker? What we want to point out is that behind this statement there is an assumption, which persons holding this view do not seek to examine properly. They take for granted that men are here to improve the conditions of other men. Is that really so? Is that the quest of life? They also take certain wills of God for granted. But if they are closely questioned, they are bound to admit that these are merely surmises. Yet they dare to build a philosophy of life upon them! We take things for granted. We do not pursue our inquiry to its logical conclusion. If, however, we follow truth to the furthest limit, we shall find that the very existence of the world is problematical. We shall find that this vast variegated universe is really nothing. We shall find that what we have hitherto taken for the will of God, was nothing of the kind. It was nothing but the sublimation of our own desires. Many of our present assumptions will fall to the ground and our outlook will be totally changed. The real answer to any spiritual question must always take into consideration the nature of the Ultimate Reality wherein man finds his eternal rest. And what is the Ultimate Reality? If we are to believe the Vedânta philosophy and the evidences of the greatest saints of all times and climes, we must admit that in the Absolute Consciousness, infinite, alone, in which there is no trace of otherness, there can be no question of world or humanity or human love. We must all realise that state of consciousness. Without it, there is no peace, no rest. This is the goal whereto all are wittingly or unwittingly wending their ways. If such is the end, what should be the means? Surely we must strive to go beyond all duality, beyond all consciousness of the non-Divine. Hence it follows that human love also must be transcended. If we maintain it, we shall be entrapped. We shall lose our way. Our progress will be impeded.

It is sometimes said that by being a householder, by marrying and begetting children, we are able to love God in different sweet aspects, as God the father, God the mother, God the beloved, God the son, God the daughter, etc. That is to say, that human love makes Divine love more varied and thus sweeter, and more enjoyable and intense. O sweet delusion! In India and to a less degree in some other countries also, the realisation of God as mother, father, etc., has not been unknown. But what has been the process? Except amongst some obscure sects who have sought to make men and women the emblems of their Divine Beloved, all the others have insisted on a complete renunciation of all domestic and social outlooks before people were fit to practise Sâdhanâ. One mistake is often made: It is true that when we have realised God, we can see Him in all human beings and serve and love Him in them. But the means to that realisation is not the continuation of the old natural outlook, but its definite repudiation. Those who have tried to realise men as Divine, know what a tremendous struggle it involves. Behind the normal, natural outlook are the Samskâras of innumerable births, wherein our love-relations to other men and women have been mainly and essentially through the body. We have never sought to perceive or love or serve them as spirit, above body and mind, but always as body and mind (superficial mind). It is very, very difficult to overcome those associations. Our mind realises men and women as physical and mental only. Such tendencies have to be conquered and destroyed after a hard struggle. The very first step is to abandon those feelings, thoughts, and actions which remind us of humanity and not Divinity and the love-relations are the most pernicious of all, because they are the deepest, and in all our previous lives have ever found expression in and through the body. A smile, a tear, a caressing word—how much these mean to the ordinary mortal! And as he tries to eliminate the human, physical element from his love, and to see the Divine shining in and through the smile and tear, his mind refuses to relinquish its old associations. Here is the tremendous difficulty, and it therefore follows that human love must first be eschewed in order to become spiritualised. Practically considered, it is impossible for householders to spiritualise their domestic relations by continuing them in their normal form. During the period of Sâdhanâ, a strenuous effort must be made to realise God as beyond all domestic felicities. Only when the perception of Him has deepened, are we able to feel His presence also in our parents, brothers, sisters, etc. Otherwise there is a great risk that we shall confuse the ideal with the real.

It is best for the ordinary Sâdhaka, the spiritual aspirant, not to concern himself with human love. Let him give himself heart and soul to God as He is in Himself. That will purify his mind and clarify his vision. If he indulges in human love as an ally in the path of spirituality, there is every chance of Moha, infatuation, stepping in, with a blurring of the spiritual vision and eventual fall. All such experiments must be carefully avoided. But the right and privilege is always left of serving others as God Himself—but observe, it must always be as God, and not as man; and there must be no reference to the usual love-relations. The human element must not be allowed to creep in; for they are fraught with danger.

We must here insist that what we have written above, only applies to sincere spiritual aspirants and not to the average man. There are many who are redeemed by the touch of human love. There are many again, whose life would dry up without the springs of human love. Most men are in this condition. Their duty then is to conceive their love-relations in the best possible spirit, to purify, ennoble, and exalt them. Then they are for their good, and essential to it. But beyond even this noble state, is the life spiritual. When a man has been sated with human love, when finite life and reality have made him restless to escape their limitations. when his heart yearns for the Infinite and Eternal, even as the mother cries for her lost child, then spiritual life begins. And then so-called human love appears as a dark, deep, weed-smothered well, to quote the significant description of Shri Ramakrishna. Like the fabulous Châtaka bird, a man then cries for the rain-drops in order to slake his thirst and refuses to drink from rivers or ponds even though they be full.

The modern age with its cheap idealism, its secularity and tendency to cover the corpse with flowers, has been trying to create a glamour about normal life, the life of the senses and surface mind. Spiritual aspirants, if they are serious and sincere, must beware of its pitfalls. Men have tried in every age to idealise the real, to shut their eyes to the grim reality that this world with all its joy and sweets is after all false. But they have not succeeded yet, and they never will.

X

THE CASE OF THE UNMARRIED

By this time we are convinced that the only thing worth seeking after in life is God. He alone exists. All else is vanity. This conviction has taken possession of our mind. We feel that all our energies should be exclusively devoted to the realisation of God. Merely talking about Him or speculating about Him does not satisfy us. We want Him as tangibly and really as we perceive the things of the senses. But how difficult it is actually to perceive Him this way ! The more we want Him, the further He seems to recede from us. Moreover our mind itself is our enemy. Although consciously we want only God, our mind often has other secret desires which distract and divide us. It is therefore a continuous struggle. Further there are our worldly preoccupations. We have to attend to certain worldly duties. We have to earn our living, to serve the family and fulfil social and other obligations. These all distract the mind from the central object of life.

Of course, if we can formally renounce the world, we can avoid many of these distractions. The world values spirituality too much to grudge a pittance and shelter to persons who have renounced all for God. And of course ordinary family and social obligations no longer exist. (This, however, does not mean that we become selfish and impervious to the needs of men. We serve society in a different and deeper way by renouncing the world and devoting ourselves to spiritual pursuits). But how many can really renounce? Even the actions of renunciation is not so easy as is imagined. There are various difficulties. Perhaps there are family entanglements, from which it is practically impossible to break away. Our mind itself may not be sufficiently prepared. Naturally, therefore, those who have to remain in the world, in spite of their conviction that God is the only thing worth realising, will have a hard task to pursue their heart's desire amidst the preoccupations of the world. We shall try to consider their situation here.

Among them we must recognise two classes : the married and the unmarried. Their cases are not the same. Firstly, the unmarried. Hindu society has not been, until recently, in favour of celibates remaining in society. It has required them to go outside the pale. A man must either become a monk or a householder. The *via media* is not desirable. This attitude of Hindu society is not without its justification. The sex-instinct is strong, very strong, in man. And the health and purity of society depends to a large extent on the proper regulation of this instinct. Unless a man is inspired by spiritual ideals, it is extremely difficult, nay, impossible, to keep the sexual instinct in check. Those who are not spiritually inclined, had better marry both for their own sake and for the sake of society. Without spirituality sexuality must find expression somehow or other. It is better to give it a normal expression through marriage. A more selfish and despicable life than that of one who does not marry in order to avoid domestic and social responsibilities and yet indulges in sensuality, cannot be conceived. Such lives are a plague to society and endanger its purity. So Hindu society does not approve of loose bachelors. Unless you possess spiritual idealism, you must marry. And if you have spiritual idealism, go out of society and live as monk. That is good for both you and society. You yourself will live in a better and less trying atmosphere, and society will have a clear and shining example in you.

But circumstances have changed. Society is no longer what it was before. There is more scope for spiritually inclined celibates than ever before. There is far greater scope for service. Formerly most social functions were a part of family duties. No distinct bodies were necessary to fulfil those functions. The service of the sick, the hungry, and the poor was part of family duty. Now separate organisations are needed for this. Society has also grown far wider in its scope. Problems are more complex. Everything is being done on an organised basis. Householders cannot do even a fraction of the work that is necessary. Celibates have, therefore, a tremendous opportunity in these days for life and activity within society. They can serve men in various ways, and service can be easily spiritualised; in fact, service can and should be done in the spirit of worship. These new opportunities are favourable to celibates living within society.

It is better for such celibates, if they have no family entanglements, to make formal renunciation. They can continue their service to men even after renunciation. But their position will be improved, and their strength increased. But if they cannot so renounce, they have to be very careful, especially about the sexual instinct. They must observe the strictest Brahmacharya. This is the foundation of everything. Without it, outward celibacy is miserable. Then there must be regular spiritual practice, and after that service. Spiritual practice consists in withdrawing the consciousness from the world, the body, and the lower mind, and concentrating it on the Divine. It may take any form—the repetition of a name of God, meditation or reasoning, or mental concentration. But every day some definite regular practice must be made. Without it service will be a mockery and there will be little progress in spiritual life. We are considering here the case of those who really yearn after God. They will, therefore, naturally devote a great deal of time to spiritual devotions. They may not have anything to do with service or anything of the kind. After attending to their daily worldly duties, they may devote the rest of the time to spiritual practice. But if they cannot thus utilise the whole day, they should employ the remaining hours in acts of service. Perhaps in the present condition of society service must be a part of everybody's life, whether a householder (married and unmarried) or a monk. But if we are to neutralise the effect of worldly influences. we must assiduously practise, every minute of our waking life, what is called spiritualisation. It consists in looking upon everything as Divine. This is a very helpful practice. It not only obliterates worldliness, but develops spiritual consciousness very quickly.

Whenever we meet a man, we consider him only a man. But we have by no means a clear conception of him. Do we consider him as a body? No. As a mind? No. As a spirit? No. Our idea of him is a confused conglomeration of all three. What we need is to perceive him as spirit only. But this is not an easy task. We have for ages habituated ourselves to associate certain ideas with the perception of what we call man. We consider him to have a certain form, a mind, good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable, and behind that an indefinite something. If we analyse our conception of man, we shall find that that indefinite something is the essential being. Forms and modes of mind are as it were extraneous wrappings. Yet these wrappings predominate in our conception. Then there is the name.

Suppose you meet your friend Hari. Around this name you have associated certain ideas, of body, mind, and consciousness; and you call it the man Hari. But analyse. When you meet Hari, do you meet a body only? You will certainly say, No. If that is so, why do you associate a particular body with your idea of Hari? You know perfectly well, it is all matter, it was once small, it has now grown big, and it changes continually. Besides it is very, very limited. But surely you do not think of Hari as being so limited. You rather think that he is a soul, a spirit in essence—illimitable, eternal, full of bliss. Is it not absurd to combine these two diametrically opposite ideas—body and spirit? So whenever you meet Hari, try to eliminate from your consciousness of him the element of body. Try to think of him, if you like in the beginning, as a mind. When you talk to him or behave with him, try to feel that you are behaving with a mind and not with a body, as you really do at present.

But that is only the beginning. Mind also is extraneous. You see how outer circumstances change the mind of Hari, how the mind has changed from infancy to manhood and how it is changing every moment. Infinite are the moods of mind. Which of them is really Hari? Of course you will say that of all those moods you find some to be more lasting and therefore they constitute his personality. But do you ever think that even those lasting elements are not really lasting? We Hindus believe in reincarnation. We know personalities change. Hari's personality then is not eternal. If that is so, then why think of Hari as a person in that sense, having certain mental modes? Why associate him with the mind? Go beyond that. What do you now find him to be? Beyond all limitations and qualifications, what is he? He is the spirit, he is God Himself! What you have so long considered to be a man, is really God Himself, infinite, eternal Sat-Chit-Ânanda (Existence-

Knowledge-Bliss) Brahman. This realisation is tremendous. It is revolutionary. Henceforward whenever we meet Hari, we do not feel his body or his mind, we feel him as eternal Âtman and Brahman. This is spiritualisation.

It is easy to conceive. But very very difficult to achieve. The human name and form have been associated in our mind with certain modes of consciousness, which are the antithesis of the consciousness of Âtman or Brahman. The moment the mind perceives a human form or remembers a human name, those ideas are associated with it. We have to deny and destroy this association; and we have to associate human name and form with the consciousness of Divinity. It is a very strenuous struggle. Every time that the mind reverts to the former association at the sight of a man, it must be made to forgo it and conceive the new association. Thus the practice must be constant, every minute of the day. But how fruitful it is of results! Of course, in the beginning, it will appear exceedingly difficult. The mind will refuse to act as desired, and ideas will become confused. But slowly the practice will begin to tell. If we can pursue this practice earnestly, in one year we shall perceive a great change in our consciousness. Men will no longer appear as they do now. With this change in our outlook upon man, will come a simultaneous change in our perception of other beings and the world. The world will reveal a new content. It will appear as instinct with Divinity. Our consciousness of our own Self will also change. We shall no longer feel ourselves as body or mind but as something finer and vaster than these.

This is a very fruitful practice. It requires a strong brain and great perseverance. But it is extremely helpful. If a man—whether in the world or outside it—practise this, there will be much less obstruction to spiritual progress. Especially is this true of those who remain in the world. It will neutralise the antithesis between the world and God and make other spiritual practices easier, and life as a whole fuller and sweeter.

XI

THE CASE OF THE MARRIED

We propose to deal briefly here with the case of the married. Naturally it is impossible within the scope of a short chapter to touch upon all the various difficulties that stand in their way. Let us, however, visualise the kind of man we wish to discuss here. He is married. He has various duties to perform, domestic, social, national, etc. He cannot easily forgo any of them. He has to earn money, and it is well known that there is little money at the end of a straight, honest path. But although he is so beset with unfavourable conditions, he feels that God is the only quest of life, He is the only reality, the only solace. He feels a sleepless longing in his heart for God. What can he do? What is the most effective procedure for him?

We have mentioned in a previous chapter that family felicities are not necessarily spiritual. Much nonsense is written and spoken nowadays about love-relations between members of a family as being Divine. Nothing of the kind. To all intents and purposes they are all Mâyâ, that is to say, they all bind and lead astray, and do not confer spiritual freedom. Hence it is clear that a householder's spiritual path is not strewn with roses. He cannot easily overcome the charm of his domestic emotions. These prove a great hindrance. They make him forget God. Then there is the question of Brahmacharya (continence). It is absolutely necessary to practise continence in order to progress spiritually. But it is superfluous to remark that this is not easy for a householder. Let it not be understood that we mean that the householder's life is not good for anyone. We do not mean that. It is quite probable that a monastic life would be worse for many. They will fare more hard if they renounce the world. It all depends on a man's spiritual condition. Unless he is ready for complete renunciation, it is better and more wholesome, and at the same time more helpful to live in the world. But it must never be forgotten that the householder's life is only a concession to our spiritual weakness, and that it is not the highest form of life, but that the highest spiritual development consists in completely renouncing and forgetting all things besides God. We must remember that whatever our present condition and form of life, the goal is all God and no world. All our heart's love must be for Him alone, and for no one else. All our powers must be laid at His blessed feet. That is the goal for all, both monks and householders.

Such being the case, the position of a householder at once appears to be no easy one. But while there must be no delusion about it, there need also be no despair.

The householder must try to practise as much continence as possible. Sincere efforts should be made by him, if he is serious about spirituality. Shri Ramakrishna said that after two children were born, the husband and wife should live like brother and sister. If the daily life of the couple is devoted to some altruistic or spiritual ideal, the overcoming of the lures of the flesh is easier. It is good to conceive some subsidiary ideal as a help to the spiritual ideal, the service of neighbours, or some intellectual pursuit. But it is best if both husband and wife feel the same spiritual yearning. That will take the mind away from the body, and instead of being a hindrance to each other, the husband and wife can help each other greatly. But in all cases they must make the habit of sleeping in separate rooms, or at least in separate beds. That is a wholesome and helpful practice.

Shri Ramakrishna used to prescribe another practice to householders—to repair to solitude from time to time. The great good that accrues from this cannot be overestimated. From our birth upwards we live in the atmosphere of worldliness. We have forgotten that there is a higher atmosphere of freedom and spiritual elation beyond the murky sky. Spiritual growth is nothing if not following a long trail. We have to retrace our steps and enter a new path. The mind, however, refuses to exert itself in any original venture. It is fond of repetition; it wants to move in the old ruts—that is easier. But this retracing of steps and visualising of new horizons become easy and possible, if we go out of the worldly atmosphere from time to time. We can then sense the new. We can watch the mind and its vagaries. We can learn which ties bind us to the world. We can feel the dominant tendencies of our mind, and above all feel in our innermost heart the uplifting touch of the spirit. Such withdrawal into solitude must be undertaken in a prayerful spirit, and not in a holiday mood. It is possible that at first the period of retirement will be short. Few of us know what a trial solitude and silence are. We are used to the surface of life, to its bustles and distractions. We feel suffocated if we are too long alone. So at first let us have short periods of solitude for one or two days at a time. Later the periods may be extended.

A practical difficulty is that solitary places are not always available near at hand. Large meadows are helpful. To watch the infinite blue sky or the sea is helpful. To lose onself in the star-spangled darkness of the night is helpful. And we may find out a solitary corner in our own house and spend some time in it every day. Isolation from the world—that is the need.

Another point emphasised by Shri Ramakrishna was the company of the devotees and Sâdhus (holy men). This is extremely effective in bringing home to us the reality of God and spiritual life. Devotees are the witnesses of God. Through them God Himself is manifested. Through them we receive contact with God Himself. And it is literally true that even a moment spent in the company of a true devotee produces lifelong results. Unfortunately real devotees are not plentiful. We may read the scriptures and the lives of saints—for they are also wonderfully effective; and we may visit temples and holy places. But a spiritual aspirant must not visit such places in the spirit of a social reformer. Social reform is good, but our purpose is somewhat different from it in this instance. One visits a temple and returns filled with spiritual elation. Another observes the unclean conditions in the temple's vicinity and returns disgusted or filled with the idea of reforming it. Of the two, which has gained the more?

Of course, the householder aspirant should regularly practise spiritual Sâdhanâ. He must approach a Guru (spiritual teacher) and receive instruction from him. And to this practice, he must devote as much time as possible. But it is clear that the greater part of his time and energy has to be devoted to unspiritual pursuits, and this is a great waste unless he obtains some compensation. But he can receive it through the practice of Karma-Yoga, and also through the practice of spiritualisation of which we have spoken at length in the last chapter.

The one great advantage of the householder whose case we are discussing is that he already feels a great yearning for God. He feels that he must absorb himself absolutely in God, but finds that the world is distracting his attention. Naturally his constant effort will be to eliminate this disturbing element, and to that purpose he should employ any effective means. Let him pray sincerely to God to draw his whole mind and energy to Him so that he may perceive Him and Him alone. This earnest endeavour and sincere prayer will open out new opportunities to him. But let him be very watchful lest he should be tempted to compromise.

By the way, Shri Ramakrishna used to advise all householders to look upon their family with a dispassionate eye, loving and serving them earnestly, but knowing all the time that they were God's and not his, just as a maid-servant in a rich man's house loves and serves all her master's children as her own, but knows in her heart of hearts that she has really no hold over them and may at any moment be dismissed.

XII

KARMA-YOGA

All those who remain in the world, whether married or unmarried, and even many of those who have renounced, have more or less to work. It is not for all to remain absorbed in meditation or contemplation the whole day. Until the mind has been thoroughly purified, it cannot be concentrated for long together on God. It will go out and seek worldly objects. In order to take advantage even of these outgoing tendencies of the mind and its occupations with the activities and objects of the world, Karma-Yoga should be properly understood and practised.

The philosophy of Karma-Yoga is simple. It is a fact that our body is a part of the vast material universe, and our mind, of the infinite cosmic mind. Now the cosmic body and mind have behind them, manipulating and controlling them, the Universal Soul or God. If that is so, then our own small portions of body and mind have really God behind them as controller and manipulator. What is then the need of interposing our own ego between God and the body and mind? Let us withdraw it. It is unnecessary. The body and mind belong to God and not to it. Let it no longer have anything more to do with them and their activities. Henceforth let God move them. If we can actually realise this state, we shall immediately find ourselves free from the body and mind and identified with Brahman Himself—we shall realise our true Self. But it is not easy to attain to this state. Nevertheless, that is the goal and that the spirit in which we should try to do all our work. A Karma-Yogi should always feel that he is not connected with the activities of the body and mind—he is not the mover of them. This non-attachment is the very essence of Karma-Yoga.

The best exposition of Karma-Yoga is to be found in the Gitâ. In the Gitâ unmixed Karma-Yoga is not generally propounded. For, very few are capable of practising it. For most men Karma-Yoga has to be related with Bhakti-Yoga or Jnâna-Yoga in order to make its practice easier. Thus the Gitâ prescribes that we must dedicate the fruits of our actions to the Lord. If we have devotion to the Lord, we shall find this very easy to do. Whatever we do, whether apparently good or evil, must be offered at the feet of the Lord, so that the works may not affect us and we may through the continual practice of such surrender learn non-attachment. Or if we are followers of Jnâna-Yoga, we may easily practise non-attachment in work, for the Jnâna-Yoga itself will impel us to consider ourselves to be beyond all actions and their effects. Therefore in practice, it is best that Karma-Yoga should be combined with Bhakti-Yoga or Jnâna-Yoga.

There are at least three stages in the practice of Karma-Yoga. First, Karma-Yoga may be practised for the purification of the mind. Most people are selfish and full of unclean desires. They are always engaged in satisfying those low, selfish desires. How can such minds ever conceive spiritual ideals? Yet they must be uplifted higher and higher if they are to become spiritual at all. For such, any practice of unselfish Karma is good. Let them work for the good of others. Of course they will not be able to do even such services in an unattached way at first, but that does not matter in their case. Let them first practise unselfish work which in itself is difficult for them. Let such unselfish work purify the mind. When the mind has been sufficiently purified, they will intuitively feel that there is such a being as God or Âtman existing, who is eternal and beyond the changing world; and they will feel a longing to realise Him. It will then be possible for them to dedicate their works and their results to God. This is the first stage of the practice of Karma-Yoga—to work for the purification of the mind.

In the second stage, work is done in the spirit of worship. We are now so imbued with the idea of Divine existence that we do not want to feel separated from Him for one single moment. We want to adore Him every minute of our life. That is easy so long as we pray to Him, or repeat His name, or meditate on Him, or sing His praise, or read books concerning Him, or worship Him in the shrine. But there will be other hours when we shall not be connected with God in any such conscious way. We shall perhaps have to work for our living and discharge social duties. Then we must strive to conceive these apparently secular actions also as worship. Every moment of our life becomes a worship. Of course here also we dedicate everything to the Lord. In fact the desire to so dedicate is the very essence of all worship. And we try to be non-attached. But the spirit of worship makes it all very sweet and natural.

But the ego still persists. We do not yet feel that God is the doer and not we. We do not feel that God is manipulating our mind and body. When the spirit of worship grows intense, self-effacement comes. Our Self is lost in the consciousness of God. God suffuses our life and being and the world. In that condition we feel that everything is the Lilâ of God—His divine sport. We are one with Him, and become partners in His Lilâ. This is the third stage. Great saints and prophets have realised this state. Their thoughts and actions are no longer theirs, but are of God Himself.

Obviously we have to consider especially the case of those who are at the second stage. They are eager to realise God and devote all their time and energy to Him. What ought they to do? Of course so long as they are consciously engaged in meditation or worship, they have little to worry about. But what ought they to do with their duties, for example, in office, or family and social circles? These also they must conceive as worship. Suppose a man is a clerk. He must conceive his clerical work as worship. He must begin his office work with an earnest prayer that what he is going to do may be a worship of the Lord Himself. In his heart of hearts he must feel that his work at the desk is not for the satisfaction of his official superiors but for the satisfaction of the Lord. In the shrine he offers flowers, leaves, and fragrance to the Lord, but in the office his offering is his official work. In this spirit let him begin his work; let him remember this motive again and again in the midst of it; and when the daily work is done, let him dedicate it to God. Let him, at the end of his day, offer all his thoughts, actions, and desires, his body, mind, and soul to the Lord. In this way, even his office work will be spiritualised. Suppose another man is a mechanic in a factory. Let him also consider that his work is worship. The fact is, every work must be lifted out of its apparent setting and offered at the feet of the Lord as we offer a flower. Thus a new setting will have to be created for every work within our soul in intimate relation with God, sweetened by our own devotion and interpenetrated by the Divine presence. It is an inner world where God alone reigns, to which we shall have to transfer every single act.

We must remember, however, that our purpose is not to work, but to be absorbed in God. No doubt at the height of Karma-Yoga, this God-absorption comes of itself. But those who are not Karma-Yogins *par excellence*, those who are essentially Bhakti-Yogins or Jnâna-Yogins, will try to minimise work and lose themselves in the consciousness of God. Their effort should be to decrease the amount of apparently secular occupations of the day and to increase the period of meditation and prayer, so that there may not be any interposition of work even in the spirit of worship. In this way they may reach a condition when their whole day will be engaged in pure meditation and worship of the Lord, in a deep and prolonged ecstasy.

But perhaps it is necessary to repeat the warning of the Gitâ that mere outward renunciation of work is not real renunciation. It should be inward above all. The mind must naturally, spontaneously, detach itself from all work. The condition of Divine saturation should be natural and not forced. For in the latter case, there is bound to be a reaction and ultimate waste of time and energy. It is better, therefore, not to give up work forcibly, but to try and perform it in the spirit of worship. When the spirit of worship has grown intense, the outer work will drop away of itself, without any conscious effort on our part.

It is needless to say that we have here dealt with Karma-Yoga as a spiritual discipline. It has a collective and national aspect, which need not concern us here.

XIII

BRAHMACHARYA

At this juncture, it is necessary to consider Brahmacharya (continence) for a short space. It concerns equally the married and the unmarried, for it is the very basis of spiritual progress. Brahmacharya has been differently interpreted and doubtless it has many implications. But its simple and essential meaning is abstention from sexual thought and deed in every form. The grossest form of sexuality is sexual intercourse. This, of course, must be given up entirely. But persistence in the practice of Brahmacharya leads to the realisation that this gross form is really the expression of inner impulses. The control and eradication of these impulses is the essential thing. Without it, mere outward abstention avails little. The root of sex-consciousness goes deep into our mind and life. It may almost be said to be contemporaneous with the very beginning of individual life. The idea of duality is in a sense the prop of the sexual consciousness. Therefore, Shri Ramakrishna said that until a man has realised God he cannot completely rid himself of lust. To recognise sexual difference in men and women is a kind of sexuality. When one has completely eradicated lust, one will not feel that difference. Only the Âtman will be apparent, existing in all, beyond all distinction of sex and body. Brahmacharya has all these wide significances among its implications. But of course, in the beginning, one cannot rise at once to such heights, but must begin on the lower plane. Nevertheless, the goal should never be forgotten. We must emphasise that what we have said above about the forms of sex-consciousness, is not at all imaginary. They are true and real; and until we have eradicated them, we have not become true Brahmachârins.

If sex-consciousness is indeed so pernicious, what should our attitude be towards it? Should we encourage it, or try to kill it in every way we can? It may be asked whether sexual control is essential to spiritual progress, and if so, why the Rishis of old married and begot children. We say with as much emphasis as we can command that it is absolutely necessary. There are reasons. Hindu readers know that our Sâdhakas and scriptures have recognised the presence of certain Chakras or occult circles in our body. These, according to them, are generally seven in number. The lowest Chakras, Mulâdhâra, Svâdhisthâna, and Manipura are situated in the lower parts of the trunk of the body, against the sexual organ and the stomach. Anâhata is situated opposite the heart, Vishuddha against the throat, Âjnâ against the junction of the brows and Sahasrâra in the brain. The mind or our self-consciousness has its centre of gravity, at any particular moment, in one of these mystic centres. We feel the uprising of the mind and its going down. Wherever the mind is, there energy and blood are concentrated. This is our common experience. When we have a high, pure thought, we feel that the upper parts of the body, the heart and the brain are stimulated. But when the thought is impure, it is the lower parts that are stimulated. What we do not generally perceive is that corresponding to these gradations of subjective experiences there are also gradations of objective realities. A man whose mind is essentially located in the lower Chakras has one experience of reality. He who has his mind in the higher circles, has quite a different experience. To the former, the world is a hellish business (of course he does not feel it as hell); he does not see anything divine in it; it is material and sensuous to him. He is full of the body-idea. He aggrandises himself physically. He is eager for physical comfort and enjoyment. He does not feel attracted to anything higher. His, in short, is an animal existence, and his experience is also animal. But if he can somehow remove his mind from those lower regions and locate it in the higher circles, his vision of the world immediately changes. He no longer finds it material and sordid. He perceives it as instinct with divine light and life. The world is no longer material to him, but spiritual. His own likes and dislikes, his desires and aspirations, his relations with others, all undergo a complete change. If he can lift his mind to the highest circle, there will be God only and nothing else.

This correspondence of the subjective Chakras with the visions of the objective reality is an essential consideration in the determination of the value and need of Brahmacharya. If we are to rise to the higher visions of reality—and spiritual progress means nothing but that—we must lift our mind to the higher subjective planes. But how can we do that if we stimulate the lower Chakras by thought and action? If we indulge in sexual thought and action, our lower circles will be excited and the mind perforce will remain there, and there will, therefore, be nothing but a low, sordid vision of reality for us, not the higher ones. So it is urgent, nay, absolutely necessary that there must on no account be any stimulation of the lower circles.

Sexual abstention is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. There is a further reason. Spiritual practice causes a great strain on the nerves and the brain. A nervous system and brain which are impaired by incontinence, are too weak to bear that great strain. They will give way before a high spiritual impulse; and the result will be total collapse and incurable disease. Besides, the perception of the higher phases of reality requires the activity of very sensitive nerves. Without Brahmacharya they die and become inoperative. Higher experiences are impossible for people who are not Brahmachârins. As regards the Rishis, we know so little about them that it is extremely difficult to say anything definitely about their actions. There is not doubt that the word Rishi was loosely applied. A physician was a Rishi; a grammarian was a Rishi; a writer of law-codes was a Rishi; and of course a man of spiritual realisation was also a Rishi. Naturally all Rishis were not spiritual, and not all of those Rishis who practised spirituality were highly spiritual. How then can we deduce anything definite from their conduct as regards the essential conditions of high spiritual life? Then, it may be that though they begot children in the prime of life, in after-life, when they gave themselves seriously to spiritual practice, they observed strict Brahmacharya. That this supreme claim of Brahmacharya is not newfangled, is clear from the fact that in the Upanishads themselves there are statements declaring the necessity of Brahmacharya for spiritual realisation. Moreover, even in those ancient times there was a body of men who never entered the world or came into contact with women, but observed complete continence. At all events actual experience is thousandfold superior to historic evidence. Let us practise Sâdhanâ and we shall feel for ourselves what a place Brahmacharya holds in spiritual life.

There are many modern ideas prevailing in our country now, which consider Brahmacharya as unnatural and detrimental to all-round development. These are all foolish ideas and Hindus at least should scorn to listen to them. It may be that sexual restraint will generate some pathological symptoms. What does it matter? Do we not gain something infinitely superior? Let us put it to the test. In spite of suffering we must proceed on our way. Surely, surely, if we can believe the saints and sages of all climes and times, the way will lead to the golden gate. Without effort, Brahmacharya cannot be practised. Restraint is necessary, although it may produce complexes. But the complexes will not be the only products of our endeavour. There will also be spiritual illumination. And that alone counts.

It is quite true that all cannot and should not practise Brahmacharya. We are, of course, considering the case of those who are seriously aspiring after spirituality and not of all and sundry. Without spiritual ethusiasm, Brahmacharya cannot be practised. A yearning after God is the primary condition of the practice of Brahmacharya. The secret is to forget the body. It is often found that being intent on the practice of Brahmacharya, too much attention is given to small physiological details and the details of food and living. There is too much consciousness of the practice of continence. This ultra-awareness is psychologically harmful and in the long run is not productive of success. The more we dwell on sexuality, whether with the desire of indulging or checking it, the less we shall succeed in getting rid of it. To forget it is the way to success. Let the thought of God so engulf you that the mind will not think of body or its comforts. For this, the repetition of the name of God is very efficacious. Of course, some helpful habits may be formed. They are necessary. But let them not become obsessions. Some restrictions about food are necessary. We must not come in contact with men or things that are reminiscent of sexuality. It is urgent that we should give up the company of those who indulge in sexuality. Too much culture of the softer feelings is harmful. We must not sleep too long or too little. The night meal should be spare;

and we should not go to bed until it is at least half digested. It is a good habit to repeat the name of God and thus glide into sleep. Too much warm clothing should not be used. Nor should the body be unnecessarily tormented. But let us repeat, nothing is of any avail unless there is an all-absorbing passion for God in our heart. It is on its wings that we are to cross the morass of sexuality.

There is no need for perturbation if there are nocturnal emissions. They do not much matter at first. Let us push forward in spite of these. By and by as our mind becomes calm and pure even these nocturnal emissions will become rare. But of course we must always be careful not to agitate our mind in any way, for such agitations produce bad dreams and peaceful sleep is a necessity. It is a good and very beneficial practice to observe partial or complete fast on the day after a nocturnal emission, praying and thinking of God. This has a wonderful counter-effect.

To those who want instruction for success in their practice of Brahmacharya, our supreme advice is that they should practise regular Sâdhanâ and forget the body and the world in the thought of God. This is the only way to success; there is none other.

XIV

THE QUESTION OF FOOD

We have said in the last chapter that the aspirant should not take exciting food. The question of food is an important one. Some space, therefore, may be legitimately devoted to its consideration. Among the Hindus the choice of food is hedged round by many restrictions. They cannot take all kinds of food. Their food must not be touched by certain persons and certain castes. Food cannot be taken by them anywhere and at any time. Many of these limitations have moral and spiritual considerations behind them. But many others are foolish and unnecessary. There is no doubt that many of the restrictions have their origin in primitive customs and conditions which are no longer existent or valid today, and nothing but custom makes them still current. Restriction of food has also its sociological aspect.

Though eating is a simple affair, psychologically it is a very important one. It has important bearings on our moral and spiritual nature. Most of us are physical in our outlook. We are mixed up with the body. Naturally that which nourishes and sustains the body, has also depends upon the state of the blood. There are certain foods which go pre-eminently to the making of muscles—the animal foods. There are other kinds of food, vegetarian in nature, which keep the blood free from fatigue-producing acidity. Fatigue, it has been found, is mostly caused by an excess of acid in the physical system. This excess is most often caused by animal food. Hence it will be seen that the kinds of food that Hindus generally take are best suited to endow them with the power of endurance. And God knows they have to endure much. But is mere endurance enough? We have tried this way for centuries. We are past masters in the art of suffering and passive resistance. But that is not enough in the worldly life. There muscular strength is also extremely necessary. What the ordinary man wants is a balanced combination of strength and endurance. Mere vegetable diet is, therefore, not enough for us. There may be a predominance of vegetables in our food, but there must also be sufficient meat. Another important consideration is that a purely vegetable diet provides sufficient nourishment only when it contains enough milk or milk-products such as ghee, butter, etc. But milk is costly. Pure milk and milk-products are hard to procure. A good nourishing vegetable diet is much more expensive than a nourishing meat diet. In the circumstances, therefore, meat should be introduced on the menu of the average Indian.

As regards the question of non-violence in food, the average man, full as he is of violence in various forms, need not be unnecessarily squeamish about it. Let him develop strength, he would be more of a man than he is now, and truly able to practise non-violence. At present it is hypocrisy. And does he not kill also when he eats plants? After Sir J. C. Bose's demonstrations, it is idle to pretend that vegetarianism is innocent. Besides that is not the Vedic ideal. This extreme form of non-violence has been superimposed on Hinduism by Jainism and Buddhism, and it is well known that Buddha himself never insisted on his monks living on vegetables only—he permitted them to take meat. As in many other things, the prevailing outlook on food must also change.

So far concerning the food of the average person. But our main concern is the food of the spiritual aspirant. What kinds of food should he take? Should he take meat or live only on vegetables? Experience has shown that vegetarianism is most helpful in the spiritual life, generally speaking. Those who have to live a life of pure contemplation, will do well to take a purely vegetable diet. Milk food is still better. Such foods do not stimulate the passions. On the other hand, they create a cool, calm balance in the bodily elements. Of vegetables, they must avoid strong things, such as onion, chilli, and other spices, or sour fruits and greens. Shri Ramakrishna used to say that one should take a full meal in the day-time, but a very spare one at night. Occasional fasting is very helpful both physically and mentally, especially if the day is spent in spiritual contemplation. As regards contact in food, we must remember that the strictness at present existing is more social than real, and more a tradition than a necessity of present circumstances. The niceties that Hindus often observed in this respect are ludicrous. One must not look at the food of another, for then the food will be polluted! One must not touch it, that also pollutes! One must not come nearer to it than the prescribed limit, or the food will be contaminated! And so on and so forth. These regulations might once have had some meaning for the average man. But now they are useless. They only serve to create mental narrowness. The ordinary man will be the better for ignoring them. We do not mean that we are to take food with every one indiscriminately. Each must decide that question for himself according to his individual tastes and inclinations and other necessary considerations. But there is no meaning in the present formal observances.

This, however, does not mean that food cannot be polluted by sight or contact. But such pollution can affect only the spiritually advanced, and not the ordinary man. Only spiritual aspirants and spiritually advanced people need be cautious about it. They must not take food from every one indiscriminately. Their food must be pure both physically and psychically. We may mention here a warning that Shri Ramakrishna used to utter to his disciples: A food anyway related to the Shrâddha ceremony, the service to the dead, must never be partaken of by the spiritual aspirant—that is extremely harmful.

From what we have said so far about the food of the spiritual aspirant it must not be inferred that he cannot take meat also. The above is only a general prescription. There are exceptions. If a man has to do physical works also in pursuit of his spiritual ideal, he may take strength-giving food, as that is a necessity for him. Then there is the question of temperament. Spiritually all aspirants do not adopt the same attitude. There are those who are of the heroic mould. Animal food does not harm them the least, because it is in conformity with their nature. There is also the question of habit. Habit goes a long way to neutralise evil effects, if there is a tendency to overcome them. These facts should never be forgotten. Even spiritual aspirants should, therefore, settle the question of food individually, each according to his temperament and necessity. And this utterance of Shri Ramakrishna should never be forgotten: If a man is devoted to God, and if he takes beef, he is much greater and better than one who is devoid of devotion but takes only rice and ghee. Food never made men spiritual. It is a help or a hindrance, that is all. But it is not the essential thing itself. The essential thing, the only thing that counts, is a keen eagerness to realise the Truth. If we have that, no food can hold us back. If we have it not, no food can help us on.

Food, before it is taken, should be consecrated to God. And while it is actually eaten, there must be the constant recollection that it is not we who are partaking of it—for we are not the body—but that it is an offering that is being made to the Being within us. This protects us to a large extent from physicality in food.

XV

THE NECESSITY OF THE GURU

In the last chapter we said that the choice of food depends essentially on one's spiritual outlook and temperament. Some kinds of food are suitable to some kinds of spiritual temperament, others to other kinds. But the question of questions is how to discover what one's temperament is. No doubt a guess may be made by a person himself. But there is a great chance that he will be mistaken. This is no exaggerated fear. Those who have undergone some spiritual struggle already, know that when we come to close grips with our mind and nature in order to mould them properly, they reveal undreamt-of complexities. The mind assumes unthinkable forms. There are so many twists and angles and contortions! The likes of today become the dislikes of tomorrow. What we have all along thought to be our predominant tendencies, leave us all of a sudden, and their places are taken by quite novel inclinations. In such circumstances, a man's own judgment proves indeed the proverbial broken reed. Some outside help becomes necessary to point out the way. Hence the necessity of a Guru.

The modern mind is so unnaturally egotistic and individualistic that it is inclined to think that the necessity of a Guru is illusory. Is not the truth already in us? Is not God everywhere? Why should we need an intermediary? These are all fine sayings, but quite meaningless. Yes, God is everywhere, and the truth is inherent in us. But it is a fact that in spite of His omnipresence and omnipotence, we wallow in the mire of worldliness for so many lives, and that in spite of our being the possessors of the treasure of truth, we continue to be as ignorant as ever. It is best, therefore, to give up such meaningless babble and proceed as serious-minded, practical persons. Somehow or other, God has made our access to Him extremely difficult. Again and again the saints of God have declared that it is only rarely that a man can realise God. And even then, through what troubles and tribulations! No argument can avail here. We can only meekly accept the statement of the inexorable truth: "That is His will—He does not let Himself be known easily." Knowing this, man has to do his utmost to realise Him. And in this attempt, there is supreme need for a Guru.

We know so little about our real selves! And so little, again, of reality! It is all mysterious. Precise knowledge of anything is so difficult to attain! The little learning that we acquire with the utmost labour of a whole life, has to be done with the help of so many persons! Without their help, our progress will be very slow, if not impossible. And yet the learning and knowledge of even the greatest scholar is nothing, is a mere speck, compared with the infinity that remains to be explored. And what is God-realisation? It is nothing less than knowing this Infinity. It is the totality of knowledge. Consider, then, the amount and kind of help we must have before we can make any real progress in the path of spirituality. This path is beset with innumerable obstacles. It is a narrow path, not straight or broad. Who can tell us if we are going along the correct path or have lost our way? Nobody but the Guru.

Nor is that all. A mere knowledge of the path, mere direction, is not enough. You must also have the *power* to walk it unflinchingly and tirelessly. You require to have new strength infused into your mind—a power and a courage that will take you whole through the tremendous struggles of the spiritual life. We know we have infinite strength within us. But this also we know that that strength has not availed us much in the past, that it is somehow under a magic lock and key and will not come out. The Guru infuses strength into the disciple. And when there are difficulties in the way, when we lose the path or get entangled, he graciously places our feet again on the right path and unties the knots that bind us. Even the bravest heart, without these aids, will quail before the difficulties and fail to reach the goal.

Such has been the experience of all who have reached God. The modern outlook in this respect is, therefore, erroneous. The fact is that such an outlook is the very antithesis of the spiritual outlook. The modern man cries: "What! shall I make myself an unquestioning slave to another? Is it not unbecoming to the dignity of man?" and so on and so forth. But the self that thus cries out, is the creation and sustainer of ignorance. It is by rejecting and transcending it that we gain the spiritual outlook. If we hold on to this ignorance-begotten self, how can we ever be spiritual? It is a mistake to think that the submission required of the disciple is slavery. There is a tremendous element of freedom in it. For you do not submit to an ordinary, erring man. The Guru is not a man like us, selfish, bound by desires, caught in the meshes of the ego, and ignorant. His personality is not like ours, finite, narrow, and crooked. It is almost one with the Impersonal. His mind is suffused with the Light Divine. His thoughts and actions do not proceed from the little self, the playground of passion, but from a Divine source. Even his body is a transformed one. He is the very Ideal personified. To serve him, is to serve the Ideal itself—the Ideal becomes man. To submit to him is to identify oneself with God Himself. Through the Guru we come in contact with the Ishta (the Chosen Deity) Himself. The Guru and Ishta are identical, they are not different. Through the Guru, by submitting to him and serving him, we make the acquaintance of the mysteries of the Lord and the intricacies of spiritual life. Therefore, the holy books have prescribed that we must realise the Lord by questioning men of realisation and by *serving* them. Without service, their instruction will not fructify in our lives.

And here is a deep truth. All words are not the same. There are words and words; and the same words, again, have different effects according to circumstances. The words of a man of realisation have a peculiar potency. On the surface, they may be simple and commonplace. Any other man perhaps could speak them. Perhaps we ourselves know them. Yet there is a world of difference. To listen to them from the lips of a man of God is to derive a unique benefit. But even the words of a man of God do not act in the same way upon all. Much depends on the Shraddhâ, faith, earnestness, and reverence of the listener. Our Shraddhâ evokes a great power in the heart of the speaker, and his words become surcharged with a peculiar power, and that power tells termendously on our own life. Much depends on our own attitude. If we are not earnest, even the words of a man of realisation prove comparatively futile in our life. Hence the necessity of service.

But, it may be legitimately asked: Are all Gurus of such transcendental character? It is true, they are not. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that before we make one our Guru, we should closely examine him and watch him for a long time, and if he fulfils all our expectations, then we may submit to him, but not until then. Once, however, we have accepted him as our Guru, even if we subsequently discover any defects in him, we must never pay attention to them. We must know him as God Himself and give him our whole-hearted allegiance. And indeed, is not God in every man? And is anything impossible to a strong faith?

XVI

SIGNS OF A TRUE GURU

Of course the Guru has to be very carefully sought for. Not all can be a Guru. Neither can every man be a disciple (Shishya). The Guru and the disciple must possess the necessary qualifications. We are considering here the case of an aspirant who is eager to realise God, who has been convinced of the evanescence of this world, who is not attached to the things of this world, and who is full of Viveka (discrimination) and Vairâgya (detachment). He is qualified to be a disciple. With regard to the Guru we must remember that a man of realisation is very rare. Not one in a million has realised the truth. Moreover if a man has realised God, he does not want to let it be known, but he would prefer to keep it a secret. That makes the finding of a capable Guru much more difficult. Then again, not all realise God in all aspects. Suppose a man has realised God, say, as Vishnu. He can be of full help only to a Vaishnava aspirant. A worshipper of Shakti will have to approach one who has realised God as Shakti, to be his disciple. That makes the choice still narrower. The fact is, as we said in the last chapter, the way to God is beset with all possible obstacles. Only an adamantine resolve can overcome them.

It is easy for us, ignorant as we are, to be deceived by pseudo-Gurus. And in truth there are plenty of them always about. We have no idea of true spirituality. A few occult powers are enough to delude us. Yet occult powers have nothing to do with spirituality. An audacious claim by any striking person, or one advanced by any well-established society, may hook us for adherence to any nonsensical creed. We are so credulous! Many are caught in the snares of these frauds, and suffer greatly. And as a result, their life is a failure and they lose faith in religion itself. But there are signs by which we may know the right person. If we are sincere, if we seek only God and do not practise religion with any ulterior purpose, we shall instinctively know if the person claiming to be a Guru is genuine or not. Our sincerity itself will be our guide. But instinct alone is not enough. We must employ our reason also. Swami Vivekananda has precisely described the signs and qualifications of a true Guru in his *Bhakti-Yoga*. We cannot do better than quote from it:

"We must see that he knows the spirit of the scriptures. . . .The teacher who deals too much in words, and allows the mind to be carried away by the force of words, loses the spirit. . . .

It is the knowledge of the *spirit* of the scriptures alone that constitutes the true religious teacher. . . . 'The various methods of joining words, the various methods of speaking in beautiful language, the various methods of explaining the diction of the scriptures, are only for the disputations and enjoyment of the learned, they do not conduce to the development of spiritual perception.' . . .You will find that no one of the great teachers of the world ever went into these various explanations of the text; there is with them no attempt at 'text-torturing', no eternal playing upon the meaning of words and their roots. Yet they nobly taught. . . .

"The second condition necessary in the teacher is—sinlessness. The question is often asked: 'Why should we look into the character and personality of a teacher? We have only to judge of what he says, and take that up.' This is not right. If a man wants to teach me something of dynamics or chemistry, or any other physical science, he may be anything he likes, because what the physical sciences require is merely an intellectual equipment; but in the spiritual sciences it is impossible from first to last, that there can be any spiritual light in the soul that is impure. What religion can an impure man teach? The *sine qua non* of acquiring spiritual truth for one's self, or for imparting it to others, is the purity of heart and soul. A vision of God, or a glimpse of the beyond, never comes until the soul is pure. Hence with the teacher of religion we must see first what he *is*, and then what he says. He must be perfectly pure, and then alone comes the value of his words, because he is only then the true 'transmitter'. What can he transmit, if he has not spiritual power in himself? There must be the worthy vibration of spirituality in the mind of the teacher, so that it may be sympathetically conveyed to the mind of the taught. The function of the teacher is indeed an affair of the transference of something, and not one of mere stimulation of the existing intellectual or other faculties in the taught. Something real and appreciable as an influence comes from the teacher and goes to the taught. Therefore the teacher must be pure.

"The third condition is in regard to the motive. The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive, for money, name, or fame; his work must be simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted, is love. Any selfish motive, such as the desire for gain or for name, will immediately destroy this conveying medium. God is love, and only he who has known God as love, can be a teacher of godliness and God to man.

"When you see that in your teacher these conditions are fulfilled you are safe; if they are not, it is unsafe to allow yourself to be taught by him, for there is the great danger that if he cannot convey goodness to your heart, he may convey wickedness. This danger must by all means be guarded against. 'He who is learned in the scriptures, sinless, unpolluted by lust, and is the greatest knower of Brahman' is the real teacher."

Why is the Guru expected to know the secret of the Scriptures? Book-learning and intellectualism have no place in religion, we know. And so why should he know the Scriptures? The idea is that the teacher must not preach things which are antagonistic to the Scriptures. If he does, we must be on our guard. He is not genuine. For the Scriptures are not mere records of intellectual cogitations, but of actual, living experiences, which are true for all time, because they relate to things that are eternal—the soul, God. If someone suddenly claims to have found out something which negatives all these previous experiences, we must mistrust him. Either he is self-deluded or he is a fraud. We must in any case beware of him. He is not a safe guide.

As regards the other conditions, the motive is obvious. A Guru must be pure both as regards Kâmini and Kânchana, lust and gold, especially Kâmini. Nowadays specious philosophies are advocated, lauding sexual intercourse as holy and sacramental. These are all the language of self-deluded fools who consider their present condition as something praiseworthy and have no idea of the true nature of high spiritual realisations and the conditions upon which they depend. We must never listen to them. What to speak of sex-action, even the slightest sexual thought is a great bar to spiritual progress. If, therefore, anyone indulges in any kind of sexuality, however refined, he is quite unfit to be a real Guru. He is himself far from the truth.

The would-be disciple must watch the Guru carefully, watch him by day and by night, and be perfectly sure that he fulfils the above conditions. If he does, then the disciple will know that he has indeed met a god among men, and he may, and indeed should, surrender himself completely at his feet.

We know such Gurus are very rare. But then, are real aspirants plentiful? They are also very rare. Most of us are only aspirants in name. We are half-hearted. We do not want God sincerely. But when once the yearning for Him has flamed up in our heart, we shall find the true Guru. The saints of God have assured us that there is this provision in the laws Divine that when we want Him seriously, He sends teachers to guide us to His sacred feet. So there need be no cause for despair. There should be, on the other hand, even greater attempts to make ourselves pure and sincere.

There is an idea prevalent amongst a large section of people that once they have been initiated by a Guru, they need not do anything further: the Guru himself will now do everything and lead them on to God. There is also the other idea that a Guru by initiating a disciple takes on himself the entire burden of the disciple's sins. Though no doubt there is some truth behind these ideas, their wide prevalence is due more to our inherent indolence than to the core of truth existing in them. There are teachers and teachers. Not all men of realisation possess such powers. Only Divine Incarnations and a few of their greatest associate-disciples possess them. They can give instant Illumination to a man and free him for ever from his sins. But others, however great, cannot do so. The disciple will receive power from them, the spark that will light the fire within him to burn away all impurities. But the disciple himself must blow the fire, and try assiduously to realise the truth and conquer obstacles for himself. Indolence cannot avail. The sooner we get rid of this complacent philosophy, the better.

The search for the Guru must necessarily be a long one. Till then, what shall we do? Let us pray earnestly to God to vouchsafe us His grace in the form of a true Guru. And let us grow more and more in the spiritual qualities. Much can be done by one's own sincere effort. We may carefully prepare the soil of our heart, so that when we meet the Guru, he may at once sow the mighty seed which is to grow the tree of ambrosial fruits.

Let us watch and pray.

CONCLUSION

We have accompanied the reader at last to the sacred feet of the Guru. The Guru will instruct him about the actual practices that are to lead him to the Holy of Holies. At that point his actual spiritual practice will begin. He has now entered the mansion of the Lord. We can accompany him no further. We do not presume to help him further. We have tried to instruct him in the preliminaries of practical religion in accordance with our light. Perhaps we have been able to help a little, perhaps not. We now take farewell of the reader, and wish him all prosperity in his voyage towards the peaceful haven of God.

Om Shantih! Shantih!! Shantih!!!

Jacket Engraved & Printed by Reproduction Syndicate, Calcutta 700006